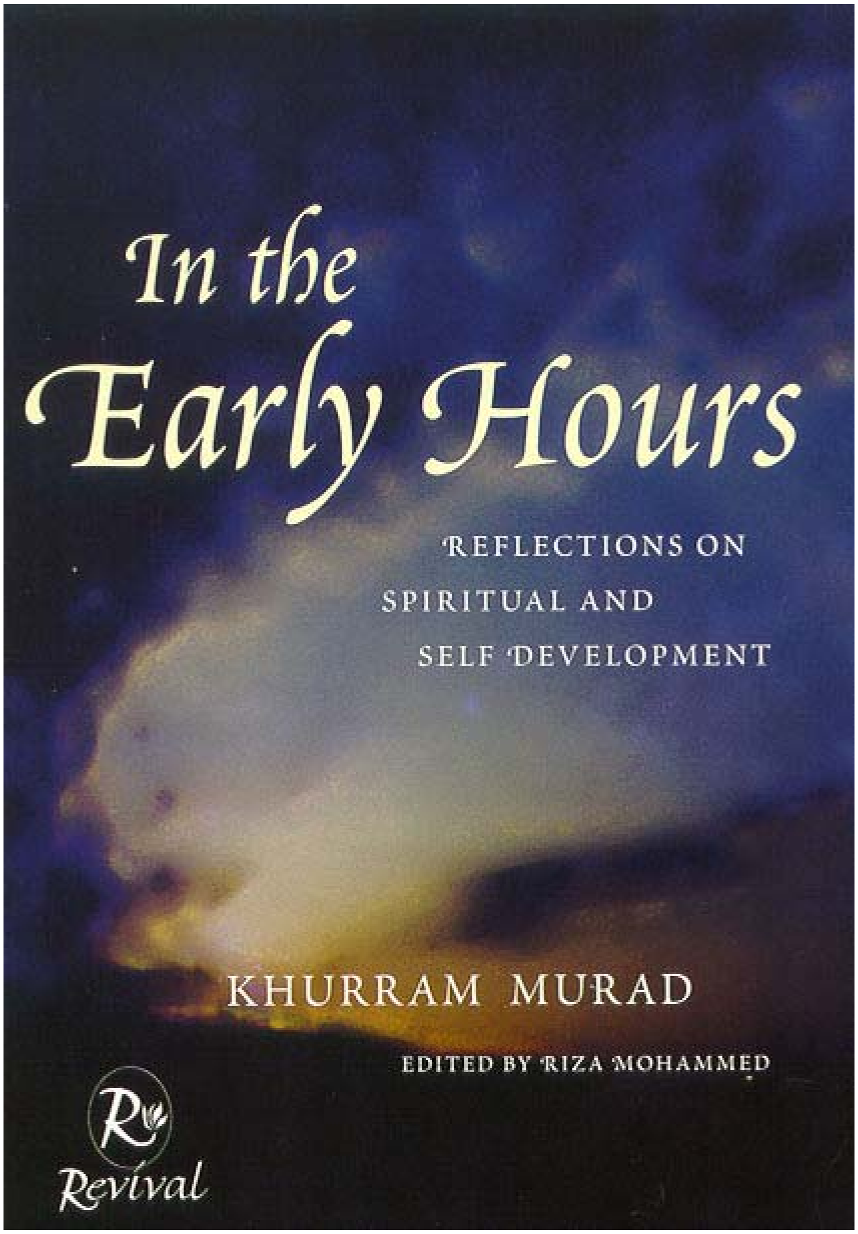


In the Early Hours: Reflections on Spiritual and Self Development (Khurram Murad)

Preface

THE title of this book, *In the Early Hours*, has been carefully and specifically chosen to highlight that precious but often neglected time during the night that Allah is closest and most receptive to His servants. The Messenger of God said:

Our Lord descends each night to the nearest Heaven when only the last third of the night remains, and says: `Is anyone praying that I may answer him? Is anyone seeking forgiveness, that I may forgive him? Is anyone asking, that I may give to him?', and this continues until dawn. (*Tirmidhi*.)

The later part of each night is the most conducive period for reflection and self development. It is the occasion with the most potential for the heart to be present, alert and free of worldly concerns as the Quran declares: *Lo! The vigil of the night is [a time] when impression is more keen and speech more certain.* [al-Muzzammil 73:6.]

This book is a collection of inspirational advice by a dear and beloved teacher, *Ustadh* Khurram Murad on the subject of spiritual and self development. In it he sets out the goal of the Believer- the single-minded desire to seek the good pleasure of Allah and Paradise. He then outlines the methods and instruments which must be used in the attainment of that ultimate goal.

These spiritual exhortations that follow were originally delivered in those early hours of Summer 1993 just after *Salat al-Fajr* as part of a course entitled *Self Development for Islamic Workers* at The Islamic Foundation, Leicester. That course represented one of many similar courses *Ustadh* Khurram conducted for young Muslims, both male and female. He recognised that it was in the young generation's eagerness, strength and enthusiasm that the future of the Muslim *Umma* lay.

Each of the seven sections in this book represents one *Nasiha* or Advice. Each *Nasiha* was delivered in a presentation of approximately 45 minutes. This time allotment was not, of course, sufficient for *Ustadh* Khurram to discuss the subjects in detail. I have therefore drawn material from several of his other speeches and works for `thoroughness', coherence and to provide clarity on the topics discussed. I have also added Quran and hadith references wherever I felt they were relevant and added to the richness of the text. Only Allah knows how close I have come to making clear the Message of the Quran and the *Sunna* as expressed by *Ustadh* Khurram.

Let me emphasise that this book merely represents an introduction to spiritual and self development. I hope that each of the topics exposed here will lead you to further study so that you can continue to grow and progress along the path of attaining closeness to Allah, our Lord and Master. A selection of suggested readings is given at the end of this text to assist in further study.

The task of preparing this text has certainly been a challenge for me, but one, which I have enjoyed and benefited from immensely. I am grateful to Muhammad Abdul Aziz, Alyasa Abdullah, Asim Abdullah, Sharifa Abdullah, Fazeela Mollick, Wajid Mollick, Hashim Mohammed and Lucy Bushill-Matthews who all read the manuscript and offered valuable comments and advice during the initial phase of this text's preparation. My deepest appreciation, however, goes to Abdul Wahid Hamid, whose literary skills, advice and motivation were instrumental in finalising this work Ultimately, though, any mistakes this book contains are my own - may Allah forgive me and have mercy on me. Whatever good is derived from it, all praise is due to Him, for without His help and guidance, nothing is possible.

I would like to end with a *dua* or supplication of the Prophet which epitomises the sole objective of this work and our goal in life:

O Allah, You change hearts, so change our hearts to be obedient to You. (*Muslim*.)

Riza Mohammed

Leicester, October 1999

CHAPTER ONE: The Process of Self Development

THE path to God is only illuminated when a person recognises the central place of God in his life and strives to develop his self accordingly. The Messenger of God said:

If someone wants to know what position he enjoys in the eyes of God, he has only to look at what place he gives to God (in his heart and life. (*Hakim*)

The term nearest in meaning to self development in the Quranic vocabulary is *tazkiya*. *Tazkiya* means purification and refers to the cleansing of the human self from all that is unwholesome, undesirable and unwelcome. It also refers to the nurturing and strengthening of all the qualities

within the human self that are essential for growth and development, for blossoming and flowering.

THE GOAL IN LIFE

Success and happiness in this world and the Hereafter depend on *tazkiya*, the purification and nurturing of our personality. The Quran states that true success is only reserved for those who seek to purify themselves:

Successful indeed is the one who purifies his whole self [ash-Shams 91:9]

Our personality comprises not only the physical body but also the mind and the heart, feelings and attitudes, character and behaviour. Proper nurturing and development of these elements of the personality will achieve desirable goals. When goals are desirable, the process of aspiring to, working towards and achieving them also become desirable. This is part of human nature. It is critical, therefore, that we recognise and understand the true nature of our ultimate goal in life.

For the Believer, the most coveted goal in life is to seek the good pleasure of Allah and Janna or Paradise. Our Creator has set this goal for us: *And surely Paradise - it is the goal* [an-Naziat 79: 41]; *Indeed the Next abode - it is truly the life!* [al-Ankabut 29: 64]; *The companions of Paradise - they are the triumphant ones* [al-Hashr 59: 20].

Know, however, that attaining the pleasure of Allah takes precedence over seeking Janna but the two are closely connected. Paradise can only be attained through seeking Allah's pleasure, and when Allah's pleasure is gained, we will indeed be granted Paradise. Reflect upon the following two verses in the Quran:

And there is a kind of person who would willingly give up personal interests, seeking Allah's pleasure; and God is Most Compassionate towards His servants.[al-Baqara 2: 207.]

Indeed Allah has purchased from the Believers their lives and their possessions, promising them Paradise, in return. [at-Tawba 9: 111.]

The alternative to attaining Paradise in the Hereafter is to be placed in *Jahannam* or Hellfire and to receive its punishments. The Quran states: *But in the life to come*: [it is either] *severe suffering, or God's forgiveness and His goodly acceptance*. [al-Hadid 57: 20.] What is it that makes a person deserving of such a suffering? The answer is to be found in the second part of the same verse: *for the life of this world is nothing but an enjoyment of self-delusion* [al-Hadid 57: 20.] *Jahannam* therefore, is for those who seek as their ultimate goal in life, not the pleasure of Allah or Paradise, but the enjoyment of worldly gains.

The pursuit of worldly gain is but a mirage. All worldly gains are left behind when you die. All that is on earth is bound to perish while Allah and His good favour will remain forever. It is for this reason that the Queen advises:

Vie with one another in seeking to attain to your Sustainer's forgiveness; and to a Paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth, which has been readied for those who have attained to faith in God and His messengers: such is the bounty of Allah which He grants unto whomever He wills -for Allah is limitless in His great bounty. [al-Hadid 57: 21.]

All your efforts in this world should therefore be focused only on seeking Paradise. It is the Promise

of the Almighty that:

You will only be rewarded fully for all your good deeds on the Day of Resurrection, and [on that Day] *whoever will be drawn away from Hellfire, and admitted into Paradise, will indeed have triumphed* [Ali Imran 3:185.]

THE FIRST STEP TO PARADISE

The first step in self development, then, is to concentrate single-mindedly on Paradise. Indeed, the one who is unsure of his destiny in life, torn between this world and the Next, like one standing with his feet in two separate boats - will be thrown off balance. Many of the difficulties that we face are due to this lack of commitment and inability to focus on the real and ultimate goal. If you can keep your focus on Janna, then everything else will be possible.

The selection of the ultimate goal of Paradise must be made consciously and may involve an absolute break with the past. To choose this new goal as the ultimate goal in one's life is in fact to choose a new life, to begin a new journey. Embark on this new journey by refreshing your *wudu* (ablution) and offering two *rakas* (units) of *Salat* or Prayer reminding yourself of all the punishment of Hellfire you have just resolved to avoid at all costs and all the rewards of Paradise that you will strive to achieve. Remind yourself also of the important stations and landmarks on the journey; imagine death as near; imagine the moment when the Angel of Death will declare, `your time is over, now you must follow me'; imagine that moment when you will be made to stand in the presence of Allah, Most High, so that the final judgment of life may be passed on you and imagine the consequences of that judgment. When you have completed the two *rakas* then resolve once more that all efforts will be directed towards achieving Paradise, beseech Allah and pray with humility:

O Allah, I ask for Your mercy and whatever brings me closer to it, in word and deed.

O Allah, I ask for a faith that will never vanish, a blessing that will never diminish, a pleasure that will never abate, and the most elevated position in Paradise distinguished by the companionship of Your Messenger, Muhammad.

While improvement in your habits and actions is a life-long process, the desire to achieve it can thus be sparked in a moment. This desire will provide the momentum for attaining your goal - the good pleasure of Allah and Paradise.

YOUR MISSION

Having taken the fast step and resolved to attain Paradise, you may ask yourself, what does Allah require from me in order for me to succeed?

What Allah requires of you, in Quranic vocabulary, is for you to be a *mumin* and *mujahid*. *A mumin* is one who is true and firm in his faith in God. A *mujahid* is one who strives his utmost, with all the means at his disposal, to gain God's pleasure. If you are a *mumin* and a *mujahid,* Allah, the Most Exalted in Power and yet the Most Compassionate, will assist you to rise to higher stations both in this world and in the Hereafter. Allah has promised this to those who possess the qualities of *iman* or faith and the active resolve for jihad or struggle. The Quran states:

The believers are only those who believe in Allah and His Apostle then they doubt not and struggle hard with their wealth and their lives in the way of Allah; they are the truthful ones. [al-Hujurat 49:15]

You now have a mission: to become a *mumin* and *mujahid*. As you embark upon this mission you may come to feel that your knowledge of Islam is somewhat limited or perhaps that you are unable to attain those heights of submission and purification that you desire or others expect of you. This is only natural. You must not, however, allow these feelings of personal shortcomings to undermine your efforts to practise Islam. Remember that Islam is a state of becoming not a state of being. Each day you must strive to improve and better yourself - and you will improve.

Tazkiya or this new programme for self-improvement that you now find yourself in, is a process that unfolds itself step by step. You cannot expect to change all at once. This is against the laws of nature. The Prophet was always aware of this when he was dealing with his Companions. Whenever someone embraced Islam, the Prophet would not ask that person to do everything immediately. Instead, he would teach and expect that person to start fulfilling his obligations only as much as he could bear at a time. This gradual process of change is also clearly reflected in the manner in which the Quran was revealed over a period of 23 years. In all your efforts towards becoming a better Believer, you must bear in mind this principle of gradualism, otherwise you may try to attain the impossible, and when you do not achieve it, you may become frustrated.

At this stage, what matters most is that your bargain with Allah, *iman,* remains sound and firm. This definition of *iman* is perhaps a little different from the definition you usually hear. It is, however, a definition that we find in the Quran [at-Tawba 9: 111]. Furthermore, attainment of such *iman,* allows you to be counted among the true and sincere servants in the eyes of your Lord. The Quran states:

Behold, God has bought of the Believers their lives and their possessions, promising them Paradise in return, they fight in God's cause, and slay, and are slain: a promise which in truth He has willed upon Himself in the Tawra, and the Injil, and the Quran. And who could be more faithful to his covenant than God? [at-Tawba 9: 111]

Once you have committed yourself to Allah, all that you have must be spent in His way. This is the ideal. Ideals, however, are always difficult to achieve - and this you must understand and accept. Ideals are always to be pursued; if they are easily and always achievable, they can hardly remain as ideals. Keeping to your side of the bargain then, is an ideal that you must always seek to maintain. It is this seeking and this striving to spend all that we have in the way of Allah that is known as jihad

and alternatively, in this instance, as *tazkiya.*

PREREQUISITES OF TAZKIYA

As you proceed on your journey along the new path, in quest of the ultimate goal of Paradise, you will encounter difficulties and hardships. These may often seem insurmountable. Overcoming them may be made easier by a good early grasp of the prerequisites of *tazkiya.* These are as follows:

1. Tazkiya - *Your Personal Responsibility*

You must accept that *tazkiya* is a highly personal process and that it demands taking personal responsibility for carrying it forward. You can only see the results of *tazkiya* through your own realisation, your own personal efforts and your own exertions. No one else can perform *tazkiya* for you. No organisation, no leader and no teacher can replace your own responsibility. God says: *And no bearer of burdens shall be made to bear another's burden; and if one weighed down by his load calls upon [another] to help bear carry it nothing thereof may be carried [by that other], even if it be one's near of kin.* [al-Fatir;5:18] This sense of personal responsibility is basic to the whole purpose and approach of Islam. Ultimately, we are judged individually for discharging our own responsibilities. If someone else fulfils your obligations, then it should be he that is rewarded, not you. To be rewarded you must do what is expected of you by Allah by yourself:

Whoever strives hard in God's cause does so only for his own good: for, verily, God does not stand in need of anything in all the worlds! And as for those who attain to faith and do righteous deeds, We shall most certainly efface their bad deeds, and shall most certainly reward them in accordance with the best that they ever did. [al-Ankabut 29: 6-7.]

Some people allow themselves to be dictated by others. The Quran states that the weak will say on the Day of judgment that they were coerced into following the dictates of others, but that Allah will reply that the excuse is not legitimate for the decision to deviate from the Straight Path was their own. [Qaf 50: 26-28]. Even Shaytan will stand up on the Day of Judgment saying: *'I invited you and you responded to me, so don't blame me, blame yourselves*.' [Ibrahim 14: 22] Ultimately, then, the blame and the reward will be yours, because the responsibility was yours:

On that Day all people will come forward, cut off from one another, to be shown their deeds. And so, he who shall have done an atom's weight of good, shall behold it; and he who shall have done an atom's weight of evil, shall behold it. [az-Zalzala 99: 6-8.]

Taking charge of your own affairs may certainly seem a daunting task, but one which you will accomplish with distinction if you appreciate and take advantage of the tremendous human potential that Allah has blessed you with. Allah says in the Quran:

Verily, We created man in the best conformation, and thereafter We reduced him to the lowest of the low - excepting only such as attain to faith and do good works: and theirs shall be a reward unending! [at Tin 95: 4-6.]

Tazkiya does not consist simply of ideas, but of life, behaviour and conduct. The key to success, according to the Quran, lies in having true faith. To inculcate true faith you must start by acquiring a sound knowledge of Islam through a dedicated study of the Quran and *Sunna*. You must then translate your knowledge into practice. For this to occur, you need to have firm resolve and determination. This, in turn, will produce *amal salih* or righteous conduct.

To aid you in your task, you must seek the company of those who are also striving to please Allah. They will encourage you towards righteousness and correct you when you deviate from the true Path. Your company also includes your mental and psychological company- the ideas you entertain, the ambitions you nurture, the sensitivities and sensibilities you develop and the books you read. All of these represent a form of company because they are your companions in solitude.

2. *Genuine Effort*

In order to succeed, you must have a deep desire to make a genuine effort to fulfill your obligations as a Muslim:

But as for those who strive hard in Our cause - We shall most certainly guide them onto paths that lead unto Us: for, behold God is indeed with the doers of good. [al-Ankabut 29: 69.]

With desire, of course, come actions. But know that it is not solely the results of your endeavours that count; what matters most is that you made your best effort. This is a very important point to appreciate because without genuine effort nothing can happen. Those who think that Prayer alone can work miracles are not living in a realistic world. Prayers are part of the effort, but Prayers are not the whole answer. If you pray, `Allah! Guide me and make me good', it is not going to bring you any benefit unless you are also determined to become good and make an effort towards becoming good. Once you have done the latter two things, then, of course, Prayer will be a source of *baraka* or Divine grace that will further inspire and strengthen your efforts. The initial desire and the ensuing effort to do and become good, is part of the continuing process of self development, a process that may begin at any point in life that you choose and continue till your last breath:

O you who have attained to faith! Be conscious of Allah with all the consciousness that is due to Him, and do not allow, death to overtake you until you have surrendered yourselves unto Him. [Ali Imran 3: 102.]

There will never be a point when you will be able to say that you are now a perfect person or that you have achieved your full potential. If at any point you feel so, then be sure that is the starting point of your downfall, On the other hand, you may find that the greater your desire to fulfill your obligations as a Muslim, the more you feel beset or plagued by frustration, despondency and despair in your heart and mind. All of us, whether young or old, have experienced these diseases, and often just give up. What we should try to remember at such times is that it is the intention and effort that matters, not the result. This effort must be a continuing process:

Be not, then, faint of heart, and grieve not: for you are bound to rise high if you are believers. [Ali Imran 3: 139]

3. *Sustaining Willpower*

To achieve the ultimate goal in life requires a sustained determination to do so, a willpower that is forever responsive and strong. In Quranic terminology this is called *irada*. *Irada* is basic to all our efforts. Without willing to do something you cannot do anything.

Irada is very different from desire. You always hear people reflecting upon unfulfilled aspirations. One of the main reasons why aspirations and dreams remain unfulfilled is that they are no more than desires which faded to assume the status of *irada*.

The Quran explains that one of the basic weaknesses in human nature which impedes self development is the weakness of will. While narrating the story of Adam, Allah informs:

And, indeed, long ago We made Our covenant with Adam; but he forgot and We found no firmness of purpose in him. [Ta Ha 20:115]

Irada requires strength and consistency and is indeed the antithesis of doubt, hesitation or lethargy. Once *irada* is firmly in place, then you must have no doubts and you must not hesitate.

Now, what purpose should *irada* serve? The Quran makes it clear that this will power must be a firm resolve to seek the pleasure of Allah because this is the part of the bargain that you must deliver:

And whoever desires [arada] *the Life to Come, and strive for it as it ought to be striven for, and are* [true] *Believers withal-they are the ones whose striving finds favour* [with God]. [al-Isra 17: 19]

4. *Reliance on Allah*

Self-confidence is borne from the Believer's intimate knowledge and understanding that Allah is ever ready to assist those who strive and struggle in His way. Self-confidence comes from depending upon Allah and knowing that He is there to help you, protect you and shower His mercies upon you:

So he who gives [in charity] *and fears* [Allah] *and* [in all sincerity] *testifies to the best- We will indeed make smooth for him the path to Bliss.* [al-Layl 92: 5-7.]

Self-confidence also emanates from knowing that Allah in His infinite mercy has equipped you with all that you require to undertake the tasks set before you. It is not characteristic of the One that is Most Just and Most Merciful to prepare you for a duel without equipping you with the necessary tools.

Self-confidence is thus borne of total reliance and trust in Allah. It is knowing that at every step of your journey Allah is there assisting you. If you constantly hold yourself back believing that you are weak and incapable and blame your incompetence on minor inadequacies, then you are bound to fail. You must never allow yourself to believe or feel that Allah has treated you unfairly or that He has placed upon you a burden you cannot shoulder for *on no soul does Allah place a burden greater than it can bear*. [al-Baqara 2:286.]

Likewise, hope is central to your efforts and your success. You must sincerely hope and believe that everything you do to earn the pleasure of Allah will lead you to fulfillment. A superiority complex negates the task of self development. An inferiority complex is derived from a lack of confidence in Allah and oneself. You should never allow yourself to believe that you cannot fulfill your obligations nor should you despair of the mercy of Allah. Confidence, hope and determination are all important ingredients for your success:

Those unto whom men said: Lo! the people have gathered against you, therefore fear them. But it only increased them in faith and they cried.. Allah is sufficient for us! Most Excellent is He in Whom we trust! [Ali Imran 3: 173-174]

You must be wary, however, of the kind of self-confidence that causes a person to proclaim himself self-sufficient. Modern concepts of self sufficiency are indeed an evil form of *shirk* or polytheism. To ascribe self-sufficiency to one's self is to assume for oneself an attribute reserved only for Allah. For the Muslim, self-confidence is wholly dependent upon the trust one places in Allah; it is not an arrogant proclamation of complete independence from Allah. Allah alone is self-Sufficient. All else is reliant upon Him for existence.

5. *The Best Use of Time*

Time is not money or gold; it is life and it is limited. You must begin to appreciate every moment of your life and always strive to make the best use of it. With all the demands of worldly life on your time, you will yet need to find time for self-development and maximise its potential. The better route towards self-development is, of course, to integrate all your efforts into a structured daily life. *Imam* al-Ghazali, may God have mercy on him, in his great work, *Ihya Ulum ad Din*, gives the following

advice:

You should structure your time, arrange your regular devotions and assign to each function a set period of time during which it is given first priority but which it does not overstep. For if you abandon yourself to neglect and purposelessness, as cattle do, and just do anything that may occur to you at any time it happens to occur to you, most of your time will be wasted. Your time is your life, and your life is your capital; it is the basis of your transactions [with God], and the means to attain to everlasting felicity, in the proximity of God the Exalted. Each of your breaths is a priceless jewel, and when it passes away it never returns.

Remember also that `the deeds most loved by Allah [are those] done regularly, even if they are few.' (*Bukhari, Muslim*.) While you must always strive to make the best use of your time, you must always aim for excellence in everything you undertake, whether at school, at home, at work or at play. Indeed, the Prophet has said, `Verily Allah has prescribed *ihsan* (proficiency and excellence) in all things. (*Muslim*.)

6*. Tazkiya -All-embracing Process.*

Islam does not subscribe to the type of asceticism where we purify our hearts and yet remain immersed in political, economic or social corruption. *Tazkiya* must encompass our entire life - the privacy of our thoughts as well as their social manifestations in our daily life. Everything must be in conformity with Allah's will.

This will of God also requires you to seek and maintain a delicate balance between the various obligations that demand your attention; between your obligations to Allah, your obligations towards others and your obligations towards yourself The Prophet advised us against extremism of any kind. It is reported that he said to Abdullah ibn Amr:

`Have I heard right that you fast everyday and stand in prayer all night?' Abdullah replied, `Yes, O Messenger of God.' The Prophet said, `Do not do that. Fast, as well as eat and drink. Stand in prayer, as well as sleep. For your body has a right upon you, your eyes have a right upon you, your wife has a right upon you, and your guest has a right upon you.' (*Bukhari, Muslim*.)

Unless you approach *tazkiya* as an all-embracing process, you will find that your life is compartmentalized, certain parts impeding the development of others. This can only result in a life of disharmony and unhappiness. Approached as a comprehensive and all-embracing process, however, you will find that each part of your life will complement some other part. This should, God willing, make your struggle on the path to God and *Janna*, easier and full of grace.

As you struggle to make headway on the path to God, always remember that you have an excellent example before you. This is the example of the Prophet Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace. Often we would like to emulate our sports heroes, our parents, our teachers, our friends or others who attract our attention. For your spiritual development, however, the most beautiful example is that of the Prophet. Allah says in the Quran:

You have, indeed, in the Messenger of God an excellent exemplar, whoever places his hopes in God and the Final Days and who remembers Allah much. [al-Ahzab 33: 21]

BLESSINGS AND BENEFITS

The decision to purify and develop yourself requires that you clearly define the path and consider the ways and means to achieve Paradise. This whole process will not only purify your heart, but also affect your entire life and the will of Allah will become so much easier for you to follow. Following the Divine Will is, of course, *tazkiya* itself, Soon, all your efforts will be directed towards the ultimate goal - the pleasure of Allah and Paradise.

Know that every sin can be effaced through forgiveness, and forgiveness is a sure way to Paradise. As you strive to better yourself, then, simultaneously and continuously pray for forgiveness for all your shortcomings. God says: *And whoever repents and believes and works righteous deeds, God changes evil deeds into good ones, and God is Ever-Forgiving, Merciful.* [al-Furqan 25:70]

It is a misconception to believe that simply by setting up Paradise as the ultimate goal, one can get there without any further effort. It is also a misconception that Paradise can solely be achieved by concentrating only on certain aspects of life, the `religious and the spiritual'. The very fact that Paradise is the ultimate objective means that *tazkiya* must be pursued in all aspects of life, and in life as a whole. Consider, for example, the following:

- Is not honesty a means to enter Paradise?
- Will not a sense of responsibility enable me to enter Paradise?
- Will not striving to fulfill the needs of fellow human beings make me deserve Paradise?
- Will not abstaining from vain talk and aimless actions, bring me closer to Paradise?
- Is not consciousness of the best use of my time a key to Paradise?
- Will not keeping promises and offering *Salat* on time, which are distinguishing traits of the righteous, put me on the highway to Paradise?
- Must not all of the above be sought to attain Paradise?

Every effort that is legitimate and is aimed at attaining Paradise is also an integral part of the process of *tazkiya*

Insha Allah (God-willing), if you take heed of all the prerequisites, blessings and benefits of *tazkiya*, you will surely find the right environment, the true companionship and brotherhood and the most appropriate training programmes to make the task of self development easier and more rewarding.

So give the good news to My servants who listen to the word [of God]*, then follow the beauty in it. Such are they whom God has guided And such are they who are endowed with understanding.* [az-Zumar 39: 17-18.]

SUMMARY

The most comprehensive goal for a Muslim is the single-minded desire to attain Paradise. This desire to seek Paradise is a life-long process which can be sparked in a moment- and this desire will provide the means and the momentum to reach the goal.

Your model for self-development is that of the Prophet Muhammad. In your quest for Paradise, you must personally take charge of your responsibilities, develop the willpower to perform and make a genuine effort to fulfill your obligations, ensure that you make the best use of your time and adopt a balanced approach to life.

Remember that every effort that is legitimate and is aimed at attaining Paradise is also an integral part of the process of *tazkiya* and that every sin can be effaced through forgiï&H§ss - and that forgiveness is the sure way to Paradise. *And as for the one who fears to stand before his Lord and who restrains himself from base desires, the Garden is surely the abode*. [an-Naziat 79: 40-41]

May Allah enable us to be among those who purify themselves for *it is God Who causes whomever He wills to grow in purity; and none shall be wronged by as much as a hair's breath* [an-Nisa 4: 49]. *Were it not for God's favour upon you and His grace, not one of you would ever have remained pure. For it is God who causes whomever He wills to grow in purity: for God is all-Hearing all-Knowing* [an-Nur 24: 21.]

CHAPTER TWO: A Life of Remembrance

IN a verse of the Quran that I love very much, Allah, Most Gracious and Loving, commends:

Remember Me and I shall remember you. Be grateful unto Me and deny Me not. [al-Baqara 2:152.]

Can you imagine a more gratifying state than this, where, when you remember Allah, the Creator, Sustainer and Lord of the Universe, He remembers you in return? The same exhortation has been beautifully conveyed in a *hadith qudsi*:

I treat My servant as he hopes that I would treat him. I am with him whenever he remembers Me: if he remembers Me in his heart, I remember him in My `heart'; if he remembers Me in a gathering, I remember him in a gathering far better than that gathering; if he draws near to Me a hand's span, I draw near to him an arm's length; if he draws near to Me an arm's length, I draw near to him a fathom's length; and if he comes to Me walking, I go to him running. (*Bukhari, Muslim*)

Those who remember Allah standing, sitting and reclining and who reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth are highly commended in the Noble Quran. They are wise in that they fill their hearts with the remembrance of God in every, moment, in every circumstance and in every posture of their lives. [Ali Imran 3: 191]

The exhortation to remember Allah at all times is a reflection of Allah's all-embracing and overwhelming love for us. The door to Allah is always open to us: *Remember Me and 1 will remember you*. We need only find our way to and through that door.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DHIKR

Regarding the significance of *dhikrullah* or the remembrance of God, Allah says in the Quran, itself the ultimate reminder (*dhikr*) to all the worlds [Sad 38: 87], the following:

Remember Allah. for He has guided you. [al-Baqara 2:198.]

O you who believe! Remember Allah often with much remembrance. And glorify Him morning and evening. [Luqman 31: 41-42.]

And men who remember God much and women who remember - God has prepared for them forgiveness and a vast reward. [al-Ahzab 33: 35]

Hadith literature is similarly replete with references to the remembrance of Allah:

The servant cannot perform a better deed which will save him from God's punishment than the remembrance of God. (*Malik*.)

Whoever wishes to feast in the gardens of Paradise, let him remember God often. (*Tirmidhi*.)

Indeed, with regard to *dhikr*, the Quran concludes: *And the remembrance of Allah is the greatest deed without doubt.* [al-Ankabut 29:45]

The significance of *dhikr* lies in the fact that it is God's own chosen and recommended mode by which the *muminun* or Believers show gratitude for having been shown the straight path. In addition, it is indeed the surest way of attaining God's forgiveness and achieving the ultimate reward of Paradise.

The importance of *dhikr* then is not difficult to understand. It is *dhikr* that purifies your *qalb* or heart and makes it sound. And you can only attain salvation and true success by having a pure and sound heart.

The *qalb* or `heart' referred to here is not the pump in your breast that pushes blood around your body but rather the centre or locus of your personality which pumps out your desires and motivations and which makes you conduct yourself as you do. It is this *qalb* that lies at your centre and dictates your actions which is the key to your ultimate success. Thus, with reference to the Day of Judgment, the Quran declares:

[It will be a Day) *when neither wealth nor children shall profit* [and when] *only he* [will be saved] *who comes before God with a sound heart* [free of evil]. [ash-Shuara 26:88-89.]

This point is more elaborately made in a *hadith* in which the Prophet says:

Listen [to me] carefully. There is a lump of flesh in the body - if it is set right and made good, the entire body becomes good and healthy; but if it becomes diseased, the entire body becomes diseased. Remember well - it is the Heart. (*Bukhari.*)

If the heart is the key to ultimate salvation and success, it may, likewise, be the seat of much corruption and open doors to many evils. It may facilitate the corruption of political and economic

activities and ultimately the social institutions of a society. Where such a state prevails, the Quran suggests that it is because people, individually, have become diseased in their hearts. [al-Baqara 2:10.] In this state, people stop seeing and doing what is right. The Quran explains that this is not because they have become blind in their eyes but because their hearts have become blind. [al-Hajj 22: 46.] This blindness only draws them nearer to the ultimate chastisement.

It is the heart, as the decider of our ultimate fate, that must then be the starting point of any *tazkiya* programme, to purify this heart and then summon it to the service of mankind.

Ibn al-Qayyim, one of the great scholars of Islam, states in his Kitab al Adhkar (The Book of Remembrance), that 'the heart which is devoid of the remembrance of Allah is a heart that is dead'; it is dead even and long before the body carrying the heart reaches its grave. Indeed, this living body that carries the heart is the heart's grave. Ibn al-Qayyim's statement is reminiscent of the hadith of tire Prophet which states: `The difference between someone who remembers His Lord and someone who does not is like the difference between the living and the dead.' (*Bukhari*.) The statement is also reminiscent of the following verse of the Quran: Do not become like those who forget Allah and Allah makes them forget themselves. It is they who are truly deprived. [al-Hashr 59:19.]

The purpose of *tazkiya* is to ensure that the heart never falls into a sorry state of being and that it is always alive with the remembrance of God. *Prosperous indeed is one who purifies himself and remembers the name of His Guardian-Lord, and prays* [unto Him]. [al-Ala 87: 14-15.] The Prophet further emphasised the importance of *dhikr* when he said to his Companions: 'Shall I not inform you of the best of your actions, the purest in the sight of your Lord, which raises your rank to the highest, which is better for you than spending gold and silver, better than meeting your enemy so that you strike at their necks and they strike at yours?' They replied: 'Yes, indeed,' and he said: 'It is the remembrance of Allah.' (*Tirmidhi*.)

Strive then, to fill all your moments, all your thoughts and all your actions with His remembrance. Recite *tasbih* or words of glorification and praise to punctuate all your actions and achievements.

THE MEANING OF DHIKR

What is the precise meaning of '*dhikr*'? What is its scope and what does it entail? Does it simply involve certain utterances of the tongue, like *Subhanallah* (I glorify Allah's absolute perfection), *Alhamdu lillah* (All praise be to Allah), *Allahu Akbar* (Allah is the Greatest), *La ilaha illallah* (There is no god but Allah) and the recitation of some other selected verses of the Quran, or is there more to it? Of course, such utterances of the tongue and recitation of verses of the Quran are important. In fact they are very important forms of *dhikr* for, indeed, the best forms of remembrance are those that involve both the heart and the tongue. You must understand, however, that the scope of *dhikr* is considerably wider.

Dhikr must not only be felt by the heart and uttered with the tongue, but must also affect and effect *amal salih*, or good deeds. Significantly, Ibn al-Qayyim suggests that *dhikr* encompasses `any and every particular moment when you are thinking, saying or doing things which Allah likes: Hence, if your conversation is filled with the words of God, this is *dhikr* and if all your actions are in accordance with His will, this is *dhikr*. Indeed Allah commends that we remember Him while standing, sitting and even while reclining. This is only possible if *dhikr* embraces every single aspect of life. Consider for example the following verse of the Quran where *dhikr* is emphasised in both Prayer and business activity:

O Believers, when the call to Payer is sounded on the Day of Congregation, hasten to Allah's remembrance and leave all worldly commerce. This a for your own good, if you but knew . And when the Prayer it finished then disperse through the land, and seek of the bounty of Allah; and remember Allah frequently that you may prosper. [al-Jumua 62:9-10]

Attending the *Salat al-jumua*, listening to the *khutba* or sermon and performing the congregational Prayer are all well known as forms of *dhikr*. But in our worldly pursuits as well we are urged to remember Allah even more often.

We may thus conclude, that attending to your personal needs, earning a livelihood and spending on your family are all forms of *dhikr*. But of course, they can only be *dhikr* if, alongside with the relevant *adhkar* or supplications in the heart and on the tongue, they are done in obedience to Allah, for His pleasure, to attain Janna. Otherwise, as the Quran warns us, far from being *dhikr*, they may have the opposite effect:

Let not your worldly possessions and your children make you neglectful of Allah's remembrance. But spend in the way of Allah. [al-Munafiqun 63:9-10.]

THE METHODS OF DHIKR

We have thus far discussed the significance, meaning and scope of *dhikr*. Let us now turn to the various forms and methods of *dhikr*. How do we remember Allah in the morning and evening, during the day and at night and while standing, sitting or reclining.' There are basically two forms of *dhikr*. The first involves continuous and sustained inner awareness of Allah in all that we say and do in our daily lives. The second involves mechanisms, whether performed individually or collectively, that help to develop the first.

1. *Sustained Awareness of Allah*

Let us begin with a discussion of the first form and its methods. How can you remember Allah throughout the normal course of your day without withdrawing from the routine of your daily worldly life? How can you ensure that your personal life, family life, professional life and other activities all continue in full swing, and yet, at the same time, ensure that your life as a whole - every moment of it - is permeated with remembrance of Allah? Such an all-pervading *dhikr* can be an onerous task, but one you can accomplish - with some ease. Let me remind you of four states of consciousness that you must strive to develop by remembering certain things, absorbing them and reminding yourself of them often.

ONE: *Say to yourself*: I am in Allah's presence; He is watching me.: *Say to yourself*: I am in Allah's presence; He is watching me.

If ever you are alone, He is the second and that if you are two, He is the third. *He is with you wherever you are*. [al-Mujadala 58: 7.] *He is nearer to you than your-jugular vein*. [Qaf 50: 16-18.] He is watching everything that you do and hearing everything that you say. He is ever present and His knowledge is all encompassing. Remind yourself of this as often as you can, and throughout the day- every time you begin a new task, and every time you speak. Indeed, your aim should be to impress this on your heart in such a way that it ultimately becomes your very breath. When the Prophet was asked by a Companion about the best method of purifying himself, he replied: `You should always remember that Allah is with you wherever you are.' (*Tirmidhi*.)

TWO: *Say to yourself*: Everything I have has been given to me by Allah.

All that there is - surrounding you, on you and in you - comes from Allah alone. There is none that creates or gives anything but Allah. [an-Nahl 16:78; Ya Sin 36:33-35.] Therefore, reflect upon all the *baraka* or blessing that He has created you with and be thankful to Him. In all the *adhkar* that the Prophet has taught us, *hamd* or gratefulness to Allah is a constant theme. Many of these *adhkar* are simple to learn, and indeed, it was the most simple of his *adhkar* that he used most frequently. When the Prophet rose in the morning, he would say *Alhamdu lillah*; whenever he ate or drank he would say *Alhamdu lillah*; and even when he relieved himself he would give thanks to Allah. Learn as many of the *adhkar* as you can, and throughout the day, as you witness all that Allah has blessed you with, punctuate your day with these *adhkar.*

If ever you appear to be short of things to be thankful for, recall the hadith of the Prophet: `There are 360 joints in the body and for each joint you must give a *sadaqa* [thanks or charity] each day.' (*Bukhari*.) You must give a *sadaqa* for each one of them because without any one of them you will be incomplete and handicapped. You must do this on a daily basis for should any one of them

become damaged one day, you will similarly become incapacitated.

Additionally, you may remind yourself that, as we now know from our knowledge of human physiology, your heart beats 72 times a minute. Every time it beats, it does so with the permission of Allah. The moment He withdraws that permission, the heart will stop beating and your life will certainly come to an end. If you feel that there is nothing else to thank Allah for, then thank him for the life that He has given you - for, so long as there is life, there is hope.

THREE: *Say to yourself*: Nothing in this world can happen without His permission.

Everything lies in the hands of Allah. No harm can befall you and no benefit can reach you except as Allah ordains. It is as the Quran informs us: *If God should touch you with misfortune, none can remove it but He, and if He should touch you with good fortune, He has power over all things. He alone holds sway over His creatures; He is the All-wise, the All-aware*. [al-Anam 6: 17-18.]

The Prophet Muhammad would supplicate to Allah after each Prayer:

O Allah, whatever You want to give me, no one can stop it from coming to me and whatever You want to prevent from coming to me, nobody can give to me.

Prayer after Prayer, you should recite these beautiful words. And beyond that, remind yourself as much as you can and throughout the day, especially as you expect something to happen, or not to happen, that everything happens only as He commands, and by His permission.

FOUR: *Say to yourself*: I am going to return to Allah one day and that day could be today.

You do not know when you will leave this world. It may be that the coming morning is your last morning, or perhaps the coming evening is your last evening. Indeed, it may be that this hour is your last hour, or even, that this moment is your last moment. Such an uncertainty does not, of course, justify a complete withdrawal from this life so as to prepare for the Next in some monastic fashion. It is important, however, that you are always conscious of this uncertainty, to the extent that it motivates you to spend every moment of your remaining life seriously, considering it as a gift from Allah and spending the resources He has blessed you with - time, ability and energy - as He has advised. Then, and only then, will your life have achieved what is required of it, and your return will achieve what is required of it. To help you attain this state of consciousness, recall and reflect upon the following Quranic verse as much as you can and throughout the day: *from Allah we came and to Him we shall return*. [al-Baqara 2:156]

These are the four states of consciousness that can help us achieve a life completely devoted to the remembrance of Allah. To try to reach these four states simultaneously, and with sincerity, can only purify you. To try in a determined fashion to reach these four states will lead you inevitably to Paradise.

2. *Specific Methods of Dhikr*

For us to achieve a continuous and sustained awareness of Him, Allah, in His Wisdom and Mercy, has

taught us some very specific mechanisms of *dhikr*. These include: the formal *ibada-Salat, Sawm, Zakat* and *Hajj*; *tilawa* of the Quran, *dua*, i*stighfar* and *tawba*, seeking the company of the righteous and *dawa*. Together these mechanisms or methods constitute what we have classified above as the second form of *dhikr*, but here we may sub-divide them into two groups: those that can be performed individually and those that are performed collectively.

3. *Methods of Individual Dhikr*

The foremost of the specific methods pertaining to individual *dhikr* include the *fard* or obligatory *ibada*. Allah has said in a *hadith qudsi*:

My servant does not draw near to Me with anything more loved by Me than what I have made obligatory. (*Bukhari*.)

Each specific formal *ibada* or act of servitude to God, has been ordained as an instrument of self development. When we observe our *Salat* regularly at the proper times, together in congregation whenever possible, with clear intentions and sincerity; when we fast in the month of *Ramadan* with awareness and resolve; when we give *Zakat* as soon as it falls due with a generous heart; and when we fulfill the obligations of *Hajj* as soon as we have the means, we will gain that special closeness to Allah that He has promised. Indeed, we may get even closer to God through additional observance of these specific formal acts of servitude, for Allah continues in the *hadith qudsi*:

My servant continues to draw nearer to Me with additional devotions until I love him. When I love him, I become the hearing with which he hears, the sight with which he sees, the hand with which he strikes and the foot with which he walks. Were he to ask for something I would surely give it, and were he to ask for refuge, I would surely grant him refuge. (*Bukhari*.)

For each specific *fard ibada*, there is an additional *nafl* or superogatory equivalent. These are as follows:

- **The *Sunna Salat*** - these include the additional Prayers before and after the five obligatory ones, but just as importantly the *Tahajjud* Prayer.

- **The *Sunna* Fasts** - as recommended by the Prophet and to be practised on Mondays and Thursdays of each week, the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth day of each lunar calendar month, and other recommended days in the Islamic year.

- ***Sadaqa fi Sabilillah*** - the giving of voluntary charity, however much and whenever one can afford, for the pleasure of Allah.

- **The *Umra*** - performance of the voluntary short pilgrimage.

In addition to the *fard* and their related *nafl ibada*, there are two further specific methods of individual *dhikr*: the first is the daily recitation of the Quran, and the second, frequent *dua* or supplications to Allah for forgiveness, guidance and fulfillment of needs.

Let us explore each of these specific methods pertaining to individual *dhikr* in more detail, particularly as instruments of *tazkiya* and *dhikr*

A. Salat

Salat is the foremost form of *ibada* that Allah Himself has prescribed for us. In His own words He commands: *Establish regular Prayer that you may remember Me.* [Ta Ha 20:14.] The whole purpose of *Salat* is to be ever conscious of Allah, the Creator, Lord and Sustainer of all things. When we perform *Salat* we involve our tongue, our heart, our mind and indeed our whole body. In this sense, *Salat* is indeed, one of the most comprehensive forms of *dhikr*. It is perhaps for this reason that Allah states in a *hadith qudsi*: `Out of all the ways through which My servant gets closer to Me, *Salat* is the dearest to Me.' (*Bukhari*.) It is unfortunate, therefore, that we do not always take full advantage of this gift. We may pray five times each day but few of us remain conscious for long that in Prayer we have the best means to develop a strong connection with Allah. We may compare the obligatory *Salat* to bathing five times a day. If after such frequent bathing, your body remains dirty, then we may question the usefulness and efficacy of such bathing.

Similarly, if after regular observance of Prayer your heart remains unmoved, your morals remain corrupt and your conduct remains unaffected, we may question the usefulness and efficacy of your Prayer? If you enter into *Salat* and come out of it the same person, then you have missed something, and you may have missed a golden opportunity to achieve something great.

Remember, though, *Salat* is an obligation. Whether your heart is attentive or not, it must be performed. You cannot give up Prayer because to you it appears useless. Don't give up the obligation but try to infuse it with the purpose it seeks to serve - remembrance of Allah.

How can you improve the quality of your *Salat*? Remember, first and foremost, that as soon as you commence your *Salat*, Shaytan makes it his duty to fill your mind with anything and everything but thoughts of Allah. [al-Araf 7: 16-17.] For, Shaytan is aware that your remembrance of Allah will draw you closer to Him, so he tries ceaselessly to disengage your mind and heart from such remembrance, so that you may never achieve that closeness. The most important hurdle to overcome from the outset, therefore, is absentmindedness. It is this that destroys the quality of your Prayer, for Allah does not accept the Prayers of a wandering mind. The Prophet Muhammad said:

God does not accept the Prayers of an individual until his heart achieves in it what his body has achieved. [Al-Ghazali in *Ihya*. See Inner Dimensions of Islamic Worship, Islamic Foundation, Leicester, p. 29.]

The ability to concentrate in Prayer may be improved by undertaking adequate psychological, mental and physical preparation before the Prayer and by utilising certain techniques whilst performing the Prayer. Below we discuss some of them.

i. Psychological and Mental Preparation

- The planning of your daily activities should revolve around the five daily *Salat*. [al-Ma'arij 70: 22-23.] Do not plan everything else and then try to fit Prayer into your busy schedule.

- Ensure that you are conversant with all the rules and regulations governing your Prayer. Research in depth the Quranic verses and *ahadith* relating to the virtues of *Salat*.

- Be punctual with your Prayer. [an-Nisa 4:103] Get into the habit of praying at the earliest hour. Do not procrastinate. The Prophet said, `the deed most loved by Allah is Prayer performed on time.' (*Muslim*.)

- Pray as much of your *fard Salat* in *jama'a* or congregation as is possible. [al-Baqara 2: 43.]

- Avoid praying in a state in which you are mentally and physically fatigued. [an-Nisa 4: 43]

- Rid your mind of all evil thoughts and ideas. [al-Maun 107: 4-6.]

- Keep your mind free of worldly worries and engagements.

- Plan what *ayat / duas* you are going to recite.

- If you do not understand Arabic learn the meaning of what you recite in your Prayer.

- Remind yourself that engaging in Prayer offers you an opportunity to release yourself from the pressures and tensions of this world. The Prophet has said that in Prayer was placed the comfort of his eyes. Therefore cherish the opportunity to remove the shackles and burdens of this world from your shoulders. [al-Baqara 2: 45.]

- Use your Prayer to remain focused on your mission in life to bring your entire being to serve only Allah.

- Use your Prayer as a source of strength, inspiration and enthusiasm for your life and activities.

ii. Physical Preparation

- Fulfill all your personal needs before you commence your Prayer, for example, thirst, hunger and calls of nature.

- Pray in a pure physical state. Perform your *wudu* with care and perfection. [al-Maida 5: 6.]

- Although the whole earth is a *masjid* or a place of worship, choose a place that is clean.

- Pray in an environment free of noise and one where there is no distraction.

- Adorn yourself with clean and respectable clothes for Allah has said: *O Children of Adam, wear your best clothes at every place of worship*. [al-Araf 7:31.]

iii. Performing Your Prayer

- Assess your mental readiness for Prayer before its commencement, during the various postures with its attendant recitations, after each *raka* and ultimately at the end- Try to make improvements at each stage

- Pray with humility both in your mental state and in your physical manner. Pray with hope and awe, asking Allah for His mercy and forgiveness.

- Remind yourself continually that you are talking to the most important `Being' in your life - your Creator and Sustainer. He is in front of you. You are facing Him and you are involved in a dialogue with Him. [al-Alaq 96: 19.]

- Commence your Prayer by seeking Allah's help and protection from the influences of Shaytan. [an-Nahl 16: 98.]

- Lower your gaze while praying and do not allow the physical environment to distract you. Anas related that the Prophet said: `My dear son, be sure to avoid being distracted during Prayer, for, to become distracted while praying is a disaster.' (*Tabarani*.)

- Use a variety of Quranic verses and *duas* in your Prayer to achieve greater concentration and awareness.

- Adopt a whispering technique in your recitation. This will increase your ability to remain focused on what you are saying. [al-Isra 17:110.]

- As you recite the Quran, translate it into your own language so that your attention is held. As you concentrate upon the meaning and implications of the words, *insha Allah*, all thoughts of worldly ideas will disappear.

- On each occasion that you recite the *Sifat* or attributes of Allah in *ruku* and *sajda*, consider how indebted you are and how grateful you should be to Allah and express your true emotions.

- Utilise the occasion of *sajda* to make additional *dua* to Allah. The Prophet said: ' A servant is nearest to his Lord when he is in *sajda*, so increase your supplication when in *sajda*.' (*Muslim*.)

- Make your Prayer of moderate duration so that you do not become physically and mentally tired but be aware that while in Prayer you must take your time praying.

- Give due regard to the proper performance of all the physical postures.

- Pray as if it is your last Prayer. The Messenger of God said: `When you stand up to pray, perform your prayer as if it were your last, do not say anything you will have to make excuses for tomorrow, and resolve to place no hope in what is in the hands of men.' (*Ahmad*.)

Performing your prayer in a satisfactory manner should lead to a radical change in the way you lead your daily life. *Salat* must be as the Quran states: *Surely, Salat prevents indecency and evil* [al-Ankabut 29: 45.] Your improved and more disciplined life will in turn help the quality of your Prayer to increase even more. The two should feed one another and continuously reinforce each other.

Note that there is punishment for a Prayer not performed satisfactorily. It will be a witness against you rather than a witness for you on the Day of Judgment. However, the reward for a Prayer well performed is immeasurable. The Prophet said: `If a man performs two *rakas* of *Salat* without the distraction of any worldly thought, all his previous sins will be forgiven.' (*Bukhari*.)

iv. Tahajjud Salat

Even though it is not obligatory, try to establish *Tahajjud Salat* as part of your nightly activities. The Prophet said: `The best Prayer after the *fard* Prayer is the night Prayer.' (*Muslim*.)

One of the characteristics of the *Ibadur Rahman* or Servants of the Most Merciful, is that they get up at night and perform *Tahajjud Salat*. [al-Furqan 25: 64] *Qiyam al-layl* or night vigil is a source of great spiritual energy. The Prophet has said:

Keep up *qiyam al-layl.* It was the way of the virtuous who came before you, it draws you nearer to your Lord, atones for your sins, forbids you from evil and protects the body from sickness. (*Tirmidhi*.)

When a man wakes up his wife at night and they pray two *rakas* (units) together, they are written down among the men and women who remember Allah. (*Abu Dawud*)

The Quran also commends the one who utilizes the early hours of each day to engage in remembrance of Allah: *Is one who worships devoutly during the hours of night prostrating himself or standing* [in adoration] *and who places his hope in the mercy of His Lord* - [like one who does not]? *Say: 'Are those equal - those who know and those who do not know?' It is those who are endowed with understanding that receive admonition.* [Az-Zumar 39:9]

B. Sawm

Sawm or fasting is another important instrument of *tazkiya.* It holds a unique status among all other forms of *ibada*. In a *hadith qudsi* we are told:

Every good deed of a man is granted manifold increase, ten to seven hundred times. But Allah says: Fasting is an exception; it is exclusively for Me, and I will give reward for it as much as I wish. (*Bukhari, Muslim*.)

The fruit of fasting ought to be that rich inner quality which the Quran calls *taqwa*:

O Believers! Fasting is ordained for you, even as it was ordained for those before you, that you might attain taqwa. [al-Baqara 2:183]

Taqwa is the most basic prerequisite for being guided by Allah. It entails God-consciousness, a sense of responsibility, accountability, dedication and awe. It is that which prompts and inspires us to fulfill our responsibilities towards the Creator. *Taqwa* is the main criterion by which Allah values the deeds of a Muslim. The Quran states: *Surely the noblest among you in the sight of God is the most God-fearing of you. Verily God is all-Knowing and all-Wise.* [al-Hujurat 49: 13.]

We must strive to the utmost to inculcate *taqwa* in our lives as Allah has ordained: *Take provisions with you, but the best of provisions is taqwa. So remain conscious of Me, O you who are endowed with insight*. [al-Baqara 2:197]

Fasting teaches us to remember Allah. It helps to instill in us certain attributes and qualities which develop our *taqwa.* We discuss some of these below.

i. Fulfilling Allah's Wishes

While fasting, the most basic physical needs - Food, water and sleep - are readily and joyfully sacrificed. Hunger and thirst are no longer harmful; Allah's displeasure is harmful. Physical pleasures no longer hold any lure; Allah's rewards do. The scale of values is turned upside down. The measures of comfort and pain, success and failure are radically changed. However, whatever the physical discomfort, the mortification of the flesh is certainly not the desired object. The gifts of Allah are there to be enjoyed but limits by Him must also be strictly observed. Once the sun has set, the fast must be broken and the sooner the better. All that was forbidden during the fasting hours, at His command, becomes permissible again, at His command. Similarly, eating before dawn is strongly encouraged even though the hour is early for it provides the necessary strength for the rigours of the day ahead. Fasting and praying are obvious acts of worship but eating also constitutes a form of worship.

ii. Willpower

Fasting strengthens our willpower. The Prophet has said: '*Sawm* is a shield [or a screen or a shelter from the Hell-fire].' (*Bukhari*.) The regime of dawn-to-sunset abstinence from food, drink and sex, for the sake of Allah alone, internalises the lesson that we must never enter, acquire or even touch that which does not belong to us under the law of Allah. A man can no longer remain a slave to his

own self-indulgence as he prepares for the arduous journey on the road to His Lord.

For many, it is difficult to see the value of long hours of hunger, thirst and sleeplessness. Productivity losses are difficult to accept in an age that has tried to promote economic growth at all costs. According to Islam, however, we are created to live a life of total submission to the One and Only Allah, and this purpose must be paramount in all scales of values. Fasting is crucial to this understanding. It shows that its purpose, like Allah's guidance through His Prophets and Books and all the rituals of worship, is to train us how we must live totally and unreservedly in submission to Allah.

iii. Protection From Shaytan

Fasting enables us to protect ourselves from the evil influences of Shaytan. While fasting: `Eyes should refrain from seeing evil, ears from hearing evil, tongues from speaking evil and hearts from reflecting evil.' (*Bukhari*.) The Prophet also said: `Five things break a man's fast: lying, backbiting, scandal-mongering, perjury and a lustful gaze.' (*Azdi*.) [Cited by al-Ghazali in *Ihya Ulum al-Din*. See *Inner Dimension of Islamic Worship*, Islamic Foundation, Leicester, P. 76.]

C. Tilawa of the Quran

The most important nourishment for the *qalb* or heart is the Quran. Those who lived in the time of the Prophet received their training and inspiration from the Quran. It was their guide, their light and their leader. Likewise, it must be your constant companion.

The Quran contains a treasure house of soul-stirring inspiration and wisdom. We can and should spend hours in understanding the Quran. There are thousands of pages of *tafsir* or Quranic exegesis to read. But we must know that the real test of benefiting from the Quran lies somewhere else. The Quran says that when people really listen to it, their faith must increase:

Believers are those who, when God is mentioned, feel a tremor in their heart, and whenever His Messages are conveyed to them their faith is strengthened. [Al-Anfal 8: 2.]

Where there is a fire, there is smoke. If the `fire' of *iman* has been lit inside the heart, there must be smoke, and you will see that those who truly listen to the Quran, their eyes begin to well up with tears which trickle down their cheeks.

Nowadays, when we listen to the Quran or read it, our hearts are not moved, nor do our lives change. It is as if water is felling on a rock and flowing away. Our task is to replace this hard rock with soft absorbent soil so that the Quran may nourish the seed that has been planted. We should always study the Quran as if it is being revealed to us today. One of the greatest injustices we do to the Quran is that we read it as if it were something of the past and of no relevance to the present.

Remember that the whole purpose of the man is to guide you and to change you by bringing you into submission to Allah. As you read it, also try to live by what it invites you to. If it does not have any impact upon your actions and if you do not observe what it enjoins and avoid what it prohibits, then you are not getting anywhere nearer the Quran. In fact, one who reads the Quran and does not try to act upon it may be more likely to be cursed and punished by Allah. The Prophet said:

Many of the hypocrites in my *Umma* will be from among the reciters. (*Ahmad*.)

He is not a Believer in the Quran who makes *halal* or lawful what has been made *haram* or prohibited. (*Tirmidhi*.)

It is also narrated that many Companions, like Uthman and Abdullah ibn Masud, once they learnt ten verses from the Prophet did not move further unless they had `learnt' it fully both in understanding and in action; that is how they sometimes spent years in learning only one *sura* or chapter.

If you sincerely start changing your life according to the Quran, Allah will certainly help you and make the path easy for you. Allah reassures us in the Quran:

Those who say, `Our Lord is Allah,' and continue upon the straight way, the angels descend upon them: Do not fear, nor be grieved, and receive glad tidings of the Garden which you were promised. We are your supporters in this world and in the Hereafter. And for you therein is whatever your souls desire, and for you therein is whatever you ask for.' [al-Fussilat 41:30-31.]

i*. The Method of Tilawa*

Tilawa or recitation is an act in which your whole person - soul, heart, mind, tongue and body - should participate. Thus, to recite the Quran, as it deserves to be recited, is not a light task; but neither is it impossible nor difficult. Otherwise, the Quran could not have been meant for everyone; nor could it be the mercy and the guidance that it surely is. There are a few obligations regarding recitation of the Quran which you should keep in mind.

- Read the Quran every day; in fact do not consider a day complete without it. It is better to read regularly, even if it be a small portion, than to read large sections, but only occasionally.

- Everyday you must also find time to memorise as much of the Quran as you can. You can start with small *Suras* and short passages and then move on to longer portions.

- Read as much of the Quran in Prayer as you can, especially during the night, after the *Isha*, before the *Fajr* and in the *Fajr*, as nothing is more effective in making you attuned to the Quran and ensuring you absorb it than reading it in the night or in the morning. Indeed, the early hours of the morning is a particularly blessed time to recite the Quran: *Indeed, the recitation of the Quran at dawn is ever witnessed.* [al-Isra 17:78]

- Read the Quran in a good voice, as we have been told: `Beautify the Quran with your voices' (*Abu Dawud*); but also remember that the real beauty is the beauty that comes with the fear of Allah in the heart: `His recitation and voice are the most beautiful so that when you hear him, you think he fears Allah.' (*Darimi*.)

- Read the Quran with concentration and understanding. The Prophet told Ibn Umar not to finish reading the Quran in less than a week He also said that one who finishes it in less than three days does not understand any of it. One companion said that he preferred to read a short *Sura* like *al-Qaria* with proper understanding than to hastily finish long ones like *al-Baqara* and *Al-Imran*.

ii. Your Constant Companion

The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, has said, `I am leaving you with two *murshids.'* The term *murshid* refers to the one who guides to the right path. The first is the talking *murshid*, the Quran, mid the second is the silent *murshid*, *mawt* or death. As much as you keep in touch with the Quran and as long as you keep in touch with the idea that you are going to return to Allah and give an account of your actions, so you will stay on the right path. You don't need any other training programme or another `person' to guide you. These two *murshids* are enough and everyone has them at his disposal.

D. Dua

Dua, supplicating to Allah, is `the spirit of *ibada*.' (*Tirmidhi*.) Indeed, it is a demand of Islam. The Prophet has exhorted us: `Allah is angry with him who does not ask [anything] from Him.' (*Tirmidhi*)

Each of your *duas* must capture the spirit of your goals and ambitions. You must offer them with humility and sincerity. The Prophet Muhammad has taught us some of the most beautiful supplications - said in beautiful words, encapsulating beautiful ideas, through beautiful ways of asking. Reflect upon the following *dua* as an example:

I am Your servant, I am at Your door. I am a poor man, I am at Your door. I am a helpless man, I am at Your door. I am a sinner, I am at Your door. I am Your guest, You invited me to come, I am at Your door. So have mercy on me.

There are many similar *duas* that move the heart and make tears flow from one's eyes. Additionally, there are *duas* that were part of the Prophet's daily routine: Prayers said while eating, drinking, sleeping, entering and leaving home. All of these *duas* must be memorised and utilised, for they remind us of Allah and His Omniscience.

But how exactly can these duas be used by us to remember Allah? Allow me to share with you one method, which can be utilised on a daily basis. The Prophet Muhammad taught us in one *hadith*:

After performing the dawn [*Subh*] Prayer, before you utter another word, say: O Allah, save me from Hell-fire [*Allahumma ajirni min an-nar*], seven times. If you die that day, Allah will decree that you be saved from Hell-fire. After performing the sunset [*Maghrib*] Prayer, before you utter another word, say: O Allah, save me from Hell-fire, seven times. If you die that night, Allah will decree that you be saved from Hell-fire- (*Abu Dawud*.)

Whenever I recite this *dua*, I use a method of recitation and reflection which helps me remember the final meeting with my Lord. For each of the seven times I recite this *dua*, I reflect on one of the stages from the Quran of the *Akhira*: the time of death; the sojourn and questioning by the angel in the grave; the time of rising and standing before Allah; the time of giving an account of all that has been done and seeing our actions displayed before us; and the passage over the *Sirat* or Bridge, then entering either Paradise or Hell.

All of these are stages of the journey. Each time that I bring to my mind one of those stages, even for the briefest moment, I supplicate to Him: `O Allah save me from the fire'.

This exercise in supplication takes me about five minutes after both *Salat al-Fajr* and *Salat al-Maghrib*. There is, however, no prescribed format to follow. You can select and form your own short course of *duas* based on the Prophetic traditions and use this as part of the regular way in which you remember Allah.

Finally, it is important for us to observe the etiquette of *dua* so that we may derive maximum benefit from them. These have been beautifully summarised by Imam al-Nawawi, where he lists ten prime conditions and dispositions that we should observe:

- Seek out the blessed times of Prayer: The Day of the Standing on the plain of Arafat [during *Hajj*]; the month of fasting [*Ramadan*]; Fridays [days of congregational prayers]; and during the night [especially the last third of it].

- Seek out the blessed moments for Prayer when the heart is receptive and tender: immediately after the five daily prescribed Prayers; between the call to Prayer (*adhan*) and the final call to Prayer (*iqama*); when breaking fast; while on the field of battle; when rainfall occurs; and when bowing down [*sujud*] in Prayer, for the Prophet said, `The worshipper is closest to his Lord while bowing down. So pray much then.' (*Muslim*.)

- Face the direction of Makka and raise the hands [with palms spread upward] to the level of the shoulders.

- Voice supplications in a moderate tone that is neither too loud nor too soft.

- Prayers need not be said in a forced rhymed prose [an often natural form in Arabic].

- Implore God with humility and reverence.

- Be fervent in Prayer and optimistic of the answer. Sufyan ibn Uyayna stated: What a person knows of himself should never stop him from supplicating to God for He answered the most evil creatures, Iblis [Shaytan], when he said, `*Give me respite until the Day they are resurrected. God said, You are of the respired ones.*' [al-Araf 7: 14.]

- Repeat requests, preferably three times, and don't be impatient or despondent in waiting for an answer.

- Begin supplication with the mention of God [His Names, praises and attributes] before asking of Him, and entreat God to send His blessings and peace upon the Prophet.

- Strive for inner purity with repentance and sincere devotion.

E. Istighfar and tawba

The process of *dhikr* must involve the recognition and confession of our faults, mistakes and aberrations and turning to Allah in asking for forgiveness with the expectation of his *rahma* or mercy. *Istighfar* is seeking forgiveness while *tawba* is taming away from our faults and returning to Allah, to His Path. When Allah desires good for a Believer, He gives him awareness of his faults. The Messenger of Allah when questioned about the nature of virtue and sin replied: `Virtue is to have good morals, sin is what pricks your heart and you dislike what people come to know about it.' (*Muslim*.) Likewise, whenever we are faced with a dilemma or uncertainty in our daily life we have been exhorted by the Prophet to observe the following guidelines:

Seek a verdict from your heart Virtue is that which your soul and heart feel satisfied with. Sin is that which troubles the soul and about which the heart is uneasy and confused, even though people may give their legal opinions in its favour. (*Muslim*.)

But what exactly does the process of *istighfar* and *tawba* entail? Ali ibn Abi Talib, may Allah be pleased with him, once saw a Bedouin repeating words of repentance in a great hurry. `This is fake repentance', remarked Ali ibn Abi Talib. The Bedouin asked, `What is true repentance?' Ali ibn Abi Talib explained that there are six elements in an act of true repentance:

- You should regret what has happened.
- You should discharge the duty which you have neglected.
- You should restore the right that you have misappropriated.
- You should apologise to the one whom you have caused injury.
- You should resolve not to repeat the act.
- You should dedicate yourself entirely to the service of Allah so that you may experience the rigours of obedience as you may have relished the pleasure of transgression.

We may now ask the question - when is the best time during the course of the day to perform *istighfar*? There is of course no special time to seek the forgiveness of Allah. But perhaps one of the best occasions is the early hours of each day which the Quran declares is the time utilised by true Believers to draw closer to their Lord: *they forsake their beds to cry unto their Lord in fear and hope.* [as-Sajda 32: 16.] The significance of this early part of each day has also been explained by the Prophet as follows:

Our Lord descends every night to the nearest Heaven when only the last third of the night remains, and says: `Is anyone praying that I may answer him? Is anyone seeking forgiveness that I may forgive him? Is anyone asking that I may give to him?' And this continues until dawn. (*Tirmidhi*.)

You should therefore start each day by taking an account of yourself: seek forgiveness for the wrongs you have done and make the intention not to repeat these mistakes. In this way you shall become free from these sins. Every day you may commit a sin, but if every day you come sincerely to Allah, then every day He will forgive you. Such is His love and blessings for us. Allah reminds us:

When My servants ask you concerning Me, I am indeed close [to them]. I listen to the prayer of

every supplicant when he calls on Me. Let them also, with a will, listen to My call, and believe in Me so that they may walk in the right way. [al-Baqara 2: 186.]

While seeking the forgiveness of Allah, you must place your full trust and confidence in Allah for He always listens and answers the Prayers of His servants. In one *hadith qudsi*, Allah has reassured us:

Son of Adam, so long as you keep calling upon Me and hoping for good from Me, I shall forgive you whatever you have done, and I do not mind. Son of Adam, were your sins to rise as high as the sky, and were you to ask Me for forgiveness, I would forgive you. Son of Adam, were you to come to Me with sins as large as would fill the earth, and meet Me having ascribed no partner to Me, I would bring you forgiveness as great as your sins. (*Tirmidhi*.)

4. Methods of Collective Dhikr

A. Seeking the company of the righteous

Dhikr can also be performed collectively. The Prophet told us that the *baraka* or blessing of Allah is with those who gather and work as a unified *jama'a* for the cause of Islam: 'Allah's hand is upon the *jama'a*.' (*Tirmidhi*.) Indeed engaging in remembrance of Allah collectively is encouraged in many *ahadith*. The Prophet is reported to have said:

If a group of people sit together remembering Allah, the angels will circle them, mercy will shroud them, peace will descend onto them and Allah will remember them among those with Him. (*Muslim*.)

Dhikr in a group may help teach those who do not know the desired *adhkar* and bring hearts together and strengthen their noble ties. To ensure that our company is always filled with remembrance of Allah, it is of paramount importance that we continuously seek the company of the righteous if we wish to be elevated in the eyes of Allah. Hasan al-Basri said in this regard:

Sit in the company of scholars. They will be pleased to see your virtues and will forgive your mistakes. They will not rebuke you when you commit mistakes; rather, they will provide clear guidance. When it is necessary to testify, they will bear true testimony to your advantage.

You must be careful with the selection of friends, for your companionship can and must be a form of *dhikr*. The Messenger of God said: `The best friend is the one who makes you remember Allah when you see him.' Also: 'Whosoever Allah wishes good for, He will grant him a righteous friend who will remind him if he forgets and aid him if he remembers'. And the Quran says: *Bind yourself with those who call upon Allah morning and evening*. [al-Kahf 18: 27-28.] As soon as you see the seed of *iman* planted in your heart and you recognise it in someone else's and you find that he agrees with you, you will feel ten times stronger. Social scientists have also discovered that group life is one of the most powerful forces to stimulate and improve the human being.

B. Witnessing Unto Mankind

Life can only be filled with *dhikr* if you strive and invite others to the path of Allah, the same path that you have found. This is a necessary outcome of your faith in Allah. The Quran advises: *Make it* [the truth] *known to mankind, and do not conceal it!* [Ali Imran 3: 187] *Help one another to righteousness and taqwa and do not help one another to sin and transgression.* [al-Maida 5:2] *Encourage one another in the truth, and encourage one another in patience* [al-Asr 103: 3.] *Remind* [others of the truth] *in the event that this admonition profits. Tire reminder will be received by he who stands in awe* [of God]. [al-Ala 87: 9-10.]

As your *iman* increases, you will yearn to share with everybody what you think and know is right and call upon them to join your mission and the *jama'a* for *who is better in speech than one who calls to God acts righteously and says: I am of those who surrender* [unto Him].' [al-Fussilat 41: 33.] Moreover, as the *jama'a* grows, your commitment to Allah will grow as well, each reinforcing the other. That is how the whole of life will become integrated in finding a path to Allah.

ORGANISING YOUR DHIKR

To benefit fully from all of the specific methods of *dhikr* whether individual or collective that we have discussed, you must strive to implement them in a daily programme of devotions, study and reflection. Set aside some periods each day to devote yourself completely to these tasks and do not allow anything to interfere with them. Spending even a small amount of time each day will bring within you a feeling of closeness to Allah and familiarity with His *Din* or way of life.

You should begin each day with some *dhikr* after *Salat al-Fajr* and make the intention that your whole day will be spent in serving Allah. Follow up the *dhikr* with a *dua* seeking provisions for the day. Allah Himself has exhorted us in the Quran:

O you who believe, celebrate the praises of Allah and do so often; Glorify Him in the morning and the evening. [al-Ahzab 33:41.]

After the *dhikr* and *dua* spend some time reciting, memorising and studying passages from the Quran for *indeed the reading* [of the Quran] *at Fajr as witnessed*. [al-Isra 17:78] If it is not possible to perform this task just after your *Fajr* Prayer then you may do it later, but you should make an effort to ensure that no day passes by without at least some reading and study of the Quran. Allocate some time also to study from a comprehensive syllabus which covers all the major aspects of Islam including Quran and *hadith* sciences, *Sharia* or Islamic law, *Fiqh* or Islamic jurisprudence, *Sira* or the life history of the Prophet Muhammad and Islamic history.

Perhaps the best way to learn about Islam is to learn from those who have more knowledge than you. You should therefore strive to attend Islamic study circle sessions, camps and courses whenever you can. At the same time, as much as you learn and improve your understanding of Islam, do not forget your obligations towards your family and those around you. Set aside a period also to teach them about Islam.

As night falls just after the *Salat al-Maghrib*, it is again recommended to make *dhikr*, seeking protection for the coming night. And then to complete the day, just before retiring, reflect on what you have accomplished - where you have succeeded and where you have failed. As for your successes thank Allah that He has enabled you to do whatever you may have accomplished. For your failures, you must ask for His forgiveness with humility and sincerity. Close the day with Prayers for help and guidance to overcome your weaknesses and to develop your strengths.

SUMMARY

Your salvation and true success lies in the purification of your heart. The key to gaining a sound heart is remembrance of Allah.

There are basically two forms of *dhikr*. The first involves continuous and sustained inner awareness of Allah in all that we say and do in our daily lives through development of certain states of consciousness. They include a continuous realisation that Allah knows everything, that everything you possess has been given to you by Him; that He has power and control over everything; and ultimately, that you are going to return to Him. The second involves specific methods of *dhikr,* some of which may be performed individually and others which must be done collectively. Each of these

specific methods helps to develop the other. When they are implemented in an organised programme of daily devotions, they will, *Insha Allah*, lead to a life of continuous remembrance of Allah.

May Allah enable us all to remember Him often and much and may He enable our hearts to find the satisfaction that we seek for *without doubt in the remembrance of Allah hearts do find satisfaction*. [ar-Rad 13:38.]

CHAPTER THREE: Relating to Allah

EACH day in our *Salat*, we repeatedly make one humble request to Allah, our Creator and Sustainer: `Guide us the Straight Way.' (al-Fatiha 1:4) It is only by seeking and staying on the Straight Way, that we can ever hope to attain true salvation and success. What then must we do to ensure that Allah accepts and grants our Prayer? The Quran explains: Whosoever holds on to Allah, he has already been guided onto a Straight Way. [Al-Imran 3:101]

CHARACTERISTICS OF `HOLDING ONTO ALLAH'

What exactly is *itisam billah* or `holding onto Allah'? How do we develop a close attachment to and a close relationship with Allah? Let us explore the answers to these questions by reflecting upon the characteristics needed to `hold onto Allah' and thus be among those who are shown the *Sirat al-Mustaqim* or the Straight Way.

1. Thankfulness to Allah

The first characteristic is being ever grateful and thankful to Allah for everything that you possess including your wealth, health, status, intellectual abilities and life. You should recognise that your very existence and your continuing sustenance are dependent on Allah. Whatever praise is due, therefore, it is due to Him alone, for nobody has the power or the resources to give you anything except by His will. His bounties and blessings are countless. Allah says:

Is, then, He who creates comparable to any that cannot create? Will you not, then, take heed? For should you try to count Allah's blessings, you could never compute them. Allah is, indeed, All forgiving, All compassionate; and Allah knows all that you keep secret as well as all that you bring into the open. [an-Nahl 16:17-19]

It is for this reason that Allah commanded the Prophet Ibrahim to say: *It is He who has created me, and so it is He who guides me; it is He who gives me to eat and drink, and whenever I am sick it is He who heals me; and it is He who makes me die and then will bring me to life. And upon Him, I pin my hope that He would forgive my sins on the Day of Judgment.* [ash-Shuara 26:77-82.]

In many places in the Quran, Allah compares the terms *shukr* and *kufr*. [al-Baqara 2:152, Luqman 31: 12]. *Iman* implies *shukr* or gratefulness as opposed to *kufr* or ungratefulness. A *kafir* or unbeliever is ungrateful to the Being who has given him everything, whereas a *mumin* or Believer is one who is ever thankful for all that Allah has given him, for he recognises that *his Lord is Merciful and Loving*. [Hud 11:90.]

Iman, therefore, requires due praise and thanks to Allah. If you are ungrateful, Allah is unaffected. If you become grateful, then you have taken the first step towards becoming a true Believer. It is for this reason that the Prophet exhorted us to `love Allah as we benefit from His grace'. (*Tirmidhi*.)

In every moment and in every situation we see our Creator and Sustainer actively involved. He has

not retired from this world. He is on His throne creating, distributing and administering everything. He governs and sustains all in the Universe. Not even a leaf can fall without His knowledge, His permission and His command. The Quran declares:

He knows all that enters the earth and all that emerges therefrom, and that which comes down from the sky and all that ascends therein; and He is with you wherever you may be. [al-Hadid 57: 4.]

Everything that happens to us - even events that we may consider to be personal afflictions or natural disasters-'are from Him. So even in times of calamity and distress, there will be some good for us, provided we respond appropriately. The Prophet said:

How wonderful is the case of a Believer! There is good for him in whatever happens to him -and none, apart from him, enjoys this blessing. If he receives some bounty, he is grateful to Allah and this bounty brings good to him. And if some adversity befalls him, he is patient, and this affliction, too, brings good to him. (*Muslim*.)

Look again at the Quran, you will see that the very first introduction to Allah is *ar-Rahman ar-Rahim*. [al-Fatiha 1:1.] Allah Himself is saying that He is the Most Merciful, He is the Most Compassionate. He shows and gives mercy to all, even those who continue to be ungrateful and rebellious towards Him: *Indeed God is the possessor of bounty for all people but most people do not give thanks*. [al-Baqara 2: 243.]

Reflect upon your own life and you will find innumerable occasions when Allah's `hand' has been holding you and helping you. So often, we subconsciously use the expression `thank God for this and that', without realising the full implications of our words. The Quran even reminded the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, that in his early life, Allah's `hand' was holding him and guiding him:

Did He not find you an orphan and gave you shelter [and care]? *And He found you wandering and He gave you guidance. And He found you in need and made you independent. Therefore, treat not the orphan with harshness, nor repulse him who asks*. [ad-Duha 93: 6-10.]

This exhortation is not only for the Prophet but for all people. From the moment that we open our eyes in this world until the moment our souls leave our bodies, and even beyond, Allah's mercy, compassion and protection remain with us. Continuously remind yourself then that your entire existence is dependent on Him. He is your Lord and Sustainer. He is nourishing and sustaining all that exists. From morning until evening, your tongue must be moist with continuous praise of Allah. In return, Allah has promised increased *rahma* or mercy for you: *If you are grateful, I will surely give you more and more*. [Ibrahim 14:7]

This is the cornerstone of your faith and the Islamic way of life. If you learn this first lesson, you will begin the process of `holding onto Allah'. *And whoever is grateful, he is only grateful for the benefit of his own self.* [Luqman 31:12] *for surely if it was not for the grace of God on you and His mercy, you would have been among the losers.* [al-Baqara 2:64].

2. Worshipping Allah

Out of that sense of receiving everything from Allah, comes another important character trait of those who `hold onto Allah' exclusive worship of Allah. The Quran states that true *taqwa* cannot be attained until all your actions in life are done exclusively to earn the pleasure of Allah:

O mankind, worship your Lord alone, who has created you and those before you, so that you may attain taqwa or righteousness. [al-Baqara 2:21]

You must ensure that your *qalb* or heart submits totally and wholeheartedly to the Creator. Allah says: *O you who believe! Enter into Islam wholeheartedly, without reservation. [al-Baqara 2: 208.]* *The only* [true] *way in the sight of Allah is Islam* [submission to the will of God]. [Ali Imran 3: 85.]

Your *qalb* cannot be compartmentalised. You cannot dedicate one piece of it to Allah and another to some other god, like wealth, status, career, spouse and so on.

There is a beautiful verse in the Quran which throws light on the absurdity of such a situation. It tells about some of the *mushrikin* or idol worshippers who sacrifice animals and then say that one part of the animal is for Allah and another is for their idols. The verse then states quite clearly that whatever is assigned to Allah is also, in reality, assigned to the idols, for Allah does not accept something divided between Him and others. He is One, indivisible and wants the human being to be undivided in service to Him. So long as our heart lies in a hundred places, so long as our eyes are set in a hundred directions, so long as we have many loyalties, we shall never be able to achieve that condition of 'holding onto Allah'.

Why should we allow divided loyalties to capture parts of our heart? Nothing in this world is going to be of use to us when we breathe our last, however hard we may have striven for it and however valuable it may seem to us. We must recognise that the prizes we seek are not the worldly possessions received from human beings like ourselves. It is only our Creator who can put a real value on our striving and bestow on us a real reward. *Shall I tell you of a business that will deliver you from a tormenting punishment?* [as-Saff 61:10] This 'business' amounts to you committing your whole undivided being to Allah alone, and selling yourself in order to earn His pleasure.

Sincerity in Worship

What does it mean to do everything *fi sabilillah*, for the sake of Allah, which should be the crux and substance of our lives? People are in the habit of classifying life's activities into those which are mundane and those which are religious. Remember, though, only those things done for the sake of Allah are the 'religious' things. Everything that is done for other than Allah however 'religious' it may seem - is a worldly act. If a person prays ostentatiously, it is a worldly act; if he fasts to expose his spirituality it is a worldly act; but if he earns thousands of pounds to support his family and to spend for the cause of Islam, seeking only Allah's pleasure, it is a highly spiritual act. The Prophet reminded us:

Many people fast but gain nothing from their fasting except hunger and thirst; and many people pray all night but gain nothing from their night Prayers except sleeplessness. (*Darimi*.)

What is of most importance to us is not the outward form of our actions. Although we perform all our duties and conform to all the protocols, it is the sincerity of purpose and intention behind our actions that really matters. The Prophet Muhammad, upon whom be peace, emphatically stated: 'Actions are judged only by intentions and everyone shall have what he intended.' (*Bukhari, Muslim*.)

Remember that purpose and intention are like the soul of a body or the inner capability of a seed. Many seeds look alike, but as they begin to grow and bear fruit, their differences become manifest. The purer and higher the motive, the greater the value and yield of your efforts. For all your daily actions, remind yourself of the motives behind your deeds. This may be the best way to ensure the purity and exclusiveness of purpose and intention.

3. Love of Allah

The next character trait of those who 'hold onto Allah' is that they love Allah. The Quran says that those who have *iman*, love Allah more than anything else. [al-Baqara 2:165.] It does not say that one must love only Allah. Love is a blessing given to us by Allah and is manifested in many aspects of life. In Islam, however, it must be foremost for Allah, our Creator and Sustainer.

What is love? Perhaps it cannot be defined in terms which adequately reflect its nature and importance in a person's life. It is not possible to define it by a formula in a manner we define a scientific fact. But still each one of us knows what love is and can tell from our own experience the powerful force that it is. It is the overpowering force in life. It captivates you, it grips you, it moves you and you are prepared to do anything for the sake of it. Once love is there, what you do is not something which has to be imposed upon you, because you need imposition only for the things you do not love. *Iman* is something which must penetrate deep into your heart and generate love for Allah and His Prophet more than anything else. Unless this happens, you cannot experience the real *iman*.

To develop this love for Allah does not require us to retire to or seclude ourselves in a monastery. This love makes us do our duty to Allah while we are out in the street, at home or in the office. With this love, we live as servants of Allah everywhere, willingly making every sacrifice required of us. In fact, it propels us to share actively in the service of Allah's other creatures. True love of Allah makes us care for people and their needs.

Whether or not you have that love is something for you to examine closely. If you love someone, one of your most intense desires will be to get closer to that person. In Islam, you have a way in which you can get closer to Allah and talk to Him and that way is through *Salat*. The Prophet said that when a person performs *Salat*, he actually comes nearer to Allah and talks to Him. If you look at how you pray five times a day, you will have a barometer in your hand to find out how much you love Allah.

Once you are praying to Him, you are in front of Him, you are near to Him, you are talking to Him, you are responding to Him in gratitude and you are asking for His forgiveness. Prayer is not just a ritual in which you go through certain postures. The soul has to surrender itself exclusively to Allah and love Him. This love is like a seed which, as it grows, envelops the entire personality.

Ihsan - The Essence of Worship

To entice us to remember Him and to love Him even more, Allah has used the beautiful words in the Quran: *Wajh Allah* or the Face of Allah. He says:

All that is on earth will perish, but the Face of your Lord will abide forever - Full of Majesty, Bounty and Honour. [ar-Rahman 55:26-27]

Everything on this earth will perish except the `Face' of your Lord. His is the `Face' you must desire. The expression `Face of Allah' does not, of course, mean that Allah has a face like ours. But, again, if you love someone, you desire to look upon his face all the time, you always want to be in his company and you will make all the necessary sacrifices to earn his pleasure. So, when the Quran

uses the expression `Face of Allah' it is really to make us conscious that Allah is looking at us and we should do the things which will please Him and abstain from things which will displease Him. Thus, when the Prophet was questioned about the true meaning of *ihsan*, he replied:

Ihsan is that you worship and serve Allah as though you are seeing Him; for even though you do not see Him, He surely sees you. (*Bukhari, Muslim*.)

If you continuously remind yourself that Allah is looking at you when you are praying, when you are studying, when you are doing your job, when you are with your family and friends, when you are involved in *dawa* - then you are well on your way to attaining *ihsan,* the most excellent form of worship. *Ihsan* takes us to the highest station of nearness to Allah. This is what gives real worth to everything we do and makes our actions acceptable in the eyes of our Creator and Sustainer.

4. Becoming Hanif

Those who `hold onto Allah' must also strive to become *hanif* Literally translated, it refers to one who is inclined or one who cuts himself away from everything that is false and belongs only to Allah. The term is used in the Quran in ten places, six times with reference to the Prophet Ibrahim, on whom be peace, and the rest for any one who is sincere and sound in faith. The term connotes sincerity, uprightness and single-mindedness in one's dedication and commitment to Allah.

A. The model of Ibrahim

The example of a *hanif* is beautifully expressed in the life of Prophet Ibrahim, on whom be peace. Let us ponder upon two of his outstanding qualities.

B. Love for Allah

Ibrahim loved Allah. He forsook all loyalties and obedience to any object other than Allah. He said: '*I have turned my face* [my entire being] *to Him who is the Creator of the heavens and earth, having turned away from all else.'* [al-Anam 6: 79.]

He brought his entire life and being under Allah's rule, ensuring that he worshipped Him with heart and body. Ibrahim understood that Allah must rule everywhere: in homes as well as in hearts, in manners as well as in minds, in public life as in private. For him, the decision to surrender was personal and free. A ceaseless striving towards that end became the substance of his life so much so that Allah endowed him with the worthy title, *Khalil Allah* or Friend of God. [an-Nisa 4: 125] With utmost devotion and concentration, Ibrahim supplicated:

My Prayer and all my acts of worship, my living and my dying are for Allah alone, the Lord of all the worlds. He has no associate: Thus I have been commanded and I am foremost among those who surrender themselves unto Him. [al-Anam 6:162].

C. Complete trust in Allah

Ibrahim was tried and tested in every, conceivable way. Whenever His Lord called upon him to surrender, he would readily respond: `*I surrender to the Lord of all the worlds*.' [al-Baqara 2:131] `If you want me to go into the fire and be burnt alive, 1 am ready for that! If you want me to leave my home, I am ready for that! If you want me to take my son and wife and put them in a place where there is no shelter, no food and no one to protect them, I am ready for that! And if you want me to make the supreme sacrifice and put a knife to the throat of that which I love best, my son, I am ready for that!'

It is following his footsteps that millions of people go to the *Baytullah*, the House of Allah, during the Hajj echoing the words of Ibrahim:

Here I am, O Lord, here I am!
Here I am; no partner hast Thou; here 1 am!
Surely to Thee is all Praise, all Goodness and all Sovereignty;
No partner has Thou!

Labbayk! Allahumma Labbayk! I am here! O Allah I am at Your command! I am always at your command! I am always ready to surrender! I am always ready to sacrifice!

Ibrahim accepted Allah as the only Lord and the only source of guidance. He had absolute conviction in the commandments of Allah. He was prepared to surrender and sacrifice everything at a moment's notice without any hesitation whatsoever. His *tawakkul* or trust in Allah was absolute. His example is reminiscent of the verse in the Quran: *If anyone puts his trust in Allah, sufficient is* [Allah] *for him.* [at-Talaq 65:3]

To become true servants of Allah, we must continuously echo and abide by the words of the Quran: *Hasbunallah wa nimal Wakil [Allah is sufficient for us and He is the best Provider]* [Al-Imran 3:173] in every circumstance of our lives.

To become a *hanif*, as exemplified in the life of the Prophet Ibrahim, on whom be peace, you must love Allah as he did, everything in life must be done to please Allah and you must trust and rely on Allah completely:

To each is a goal to which Allah turns him: So strive together as in a race towards all that is good. [al-Baqara 2:148.]

5. Jihad- Striving in the Path of Allah

The next characteristic of `holding onto Allah' is to strive with all the means at your disposal to make the Word of Allah supreme within your heart and in the hearts of those around you. You must therefore bring all of mankind to Allah by witnessing to His guidance, *so that you be witnesses unto mankind and The Messenger be witness unto you*. [al-Baqara 2:143.]

In the *Sira*, we note that when the first ray of Divine Revelation reached Muhammad in Hira [al-Alaq 96: 1-5], the command of '*Iqra*' or Read was impregnated with world-shaking forces. He trembled. The second Revelation made things clear: *Arise and warn*! *And your Sustainer's greatness glorify!* [al-Muddaththir 74:2-3.] The Prophet Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, then took up his task with a single-minded dedication and encountered stiff opposition. The call to *let Allah be the Greatest* implied that all false claimants - and every claimant is false - to greatness, to unlimited power, authority and lordship to obedience, loyalty and servitude from Allah's creatures, must be challenged and dethroned. It is not difficult to see that this requires *hijra*, supreme sacrifices in `giving up' everything one loves and fighting with all that one possesses for the sake of that love of Allah which must be greater than all else. Allah says:

And strive hard in God's cause with all the striving that is due to Him. It is He who has elected you [to carry His Message] *and has laid no hardship on you in* [anything that pertains to] *religion* [and make you follow] *the need of your father Ibrahim.* [al-Hajj 22: 78]

The Believers are only those who [truly] *believe in Allah and His Messenger, and then they doubt not; and who struggle hard with their wealth and their lives in the way of Allah; it is they who are the truthful ones*. [al-Hujurat 49:15.]

A life of jihad necessarily requires important qualities: knowledge of and devotion to the Quran, *iman* or deep and strong faith, *sabr* or resolve and steadfastness. Read the Quran and you will find every promise of success here and in the Hereafter conditional upon these qualities.

A. Acquiring knowledge

In order to fulfill your mission in life as the *khalifa* or ambassador of Allah in the establishment of His way of life, you need to arm yourself with *ilm* or knowledge of Islam. The Prophet Muhammad has said: 'Whoever Allah wishes good for, He bestows upon him a deep understanding of the Din.' (*Bukhari, Muslim*.) The Quran also exhalts those who possess useful knowledge and use it as an instrument to develop their closeness to Allah: *Are those who know equal to those who do not? Only those with insight can keep it in mind* [az-Zumar 39:9]. *God will exalt those who believe among you and those who have knowledge to high ranks* [al-Mujadala 58:11]. *Of all His servants only those who know fear God*. [al-Fatir 35:28]. The Prophet also said that there are countless rewards both in this world and the Next for one who seeks to educate and purify himself:

If one travels in search of knowledge, Allah will make him travel to Paradise. The angels, being highly pleased with him, spread their wings over the seeker of knowledge. Everything in the heavens and on earth, even the fish in the depths of water, seek forgiveness for a scholar. And the superiority of a learned man over one engaged in ritual worship is like that of a full moon over the rest of the stars. (*Ahmad*)

Consider the following guidelines as you set out on the path to educate yourself.

- Seek to have a sound understanding of the Quran and *Sunna*. May Allah bless the renowned Islamic scholar al-Muhallab, who advised his children: Acquire knowledge before you become leaders so that leadership does not keep you preoccupied from acquiring knowledge. [Fathi Yakan, *Problems of the Dawa and the Daiya*, IIFSO, Kuwait, 1984. p. 71.]

- Try to improve your reading, writing and oratory skills.

- Be well versed in the issues of the day by reading current newspapers, magazines and journals.

- Strive to have a good understanding of contemporary issues and problems affecting society.

- Strive also to understand the problems of the Muslims in such depth as to develop your own solutions in the light of the Quran and Sunna.

- Develop a personal library even if it is a small one and most of all cherish your Islamic books.

B. Practicing what you preach

`Real' *iman,* once lodged in the heart and embedded at the centre of life, must flourish into a mighty tree of righteous deeds. True *iman* which resides in hearts, shapes lives, and finds acceptance with Allah is always differentiated in the Quran from outward, `legal' *islam*.

The Bedouins say, `We believe.' Say: you do not believe, rather say, We have surrendered; for [true] faith has not yet entered their hearts. [al-Hujurat 49:15.]

Similarly, mere verbal professions of faith, which are contradicted by actions, are rejected.

O Messenger, let not those grieve you who vie with one another in [the cause of] *kufr from among those who say `We believe' with their mouths, but their hearts believe not.* [al-Maida 5:41]

Even Believers are often called upon `to believe', that is, to attain true faith: *O Believers, believe in Allah and His Messenger, and the Book He sent down before*. [an-Nisa 4:136.] Or, *Believe in Allah and His Messenger, and spend out of that in which we have made you vicegerents*. [al-Hadid 57: 7.]

The connection between *iman* and actions is clearly manifest in the way both are almost always linked together: *al-ladhina amanu wa amilus-salihat* [those who believe and do righteous deeds].

The bond between true faith and ritual worship on the one hand, and a life lived totally in worship, which leads to justice and compassion in society on the other, is firmly established in many places in the Quran:

Have you seen him who denies Judgment? That is the one who repulses the orphan and urges not the feeding of the needy. Woe to those that pray and are unmindful of their Prayer, those who want to be seen, and who refuse small kindnesses. [al-Maun 107:1-5]

When we examine the body of *hadith* literature, we will also, immediately realise how the Prophet links a wide range of values and actions with *iman* in a very clear and defined manner. Just look at

some of them:

No one among you believes until all his desires follow what I have brought. (*Sharh al-Sunna*)

What lies between a man and *kufr* is the abandonment of Prayer. (*Muslim*.)

While one fornicates he is not a Believer, while one steals he is not a Believer, while one drinks he is not a Believer, while one takes plunder which makes men look at him he is not a Believer, and while one defrauds he is not a Believer. (*Bukhari, Muslim*.)

Flesh which has grown out of the unlawful earnings will not enter Paradise, for Hell is more fitting for all flesh which has grown out of the unlawful. (*Ahmad*)

Finally, remember that as a *daiya* or caller to Islam you need to set an excellent example and you need to practice what you preach. Those who do not follow their own advice have been strongly condemned by Allah. Keep close to you the following verses of the Quran:

O you who believe! Why do you say that which you do not do? Grievously hateful is it in the sight of Allah that you should say what you do not do. [as-Saff 61:2-3.]

Do you enjoin righteousness upon mankind while you yourselves forget [to practice it]? And you are readers of the Scripture/ Have you then no sense? [al-Baqara 2: 44.]

C. Developing patience and perseverance

There will be many obstacles and hardships that may prevent you from fulfilling your obligations to Allah and you therefore need to develop *sabr* or patience and perseverance. The Quran states: *So* [O Believers] *endure hardship with beautiful endurance*. [al-Ma'arij 70: 5] *So, patience is beautiful*. [Yusuf 12:84] *And God is with those who patiently persevere*. [al-Anfal 8: 66.]

Know that life is filled with tests and trials. Allah reminds us in the Quran:

Do men think that they will be left alone on saying, `We believe; and that they will not be tested? We did test those before them and Allah will certainly know those who are true from those who are false. [al-Ankabut 29:2-3.]

The best of people therefore are those who bear their tests and trials with fortitude and optimism and who see in every difficulty an opportunity to turn to Allah in remembrance and prayer. Remind yourself constantly that *Allah shall make ease after hardship* [at-Talaq 65: 7], *and that on no soul does He place a burden greater than it can bear* [al-Araf 7: 42]. Remember that He has all the power. He gives everything. No harm can come to Him, and no benefit can come to Him. Everything that is happening in life is because of Him and comes from Him for no power is there save with Allah, the Most High, the Great.

IMPEDIMENTS IN `HOLDING ONTO ALLAH'

There are some character traits that you must take care to rid yourself of as you strive to `hold onto Allah'.

1. Pride

One such evil and impediment is *kibr* or pride. This represents the antithesis of humility and is a devastating moral ailment. The efforts which we make for *tazkiya*, it is hoped, will make us successful. But if one is successful, the greatest cancer that can eat everything away, is *kibr*. The Messenger of Allah said:

`No one will he admitted into Paradise who has even a tiny grain of pride in his heart.'
A man asked him: But what if someone likes to dress well and put on good sandals?'
He replied: `Truly Allah is beautiful, and He loves beauty. Pride is to disdain the truth, and to belittle and despise other people.' (*Muslim*.)

The day you feel that you have attained something special is the day of your spiritual death. Thus, the entire effort which you make should continue to be permeated with humility. Always remember that whatever you have achieved is by the grace of Allah, not through your own efforts.

Secondly, know that the ideal for you to emulate is the *uswa* of the Prophet. His example is so high and exalted: *And you [Muhammad] stand on an exalted standard of character*. [al-Qalam 68:4.] One of the reasons the `ideal' standard is so high, is to ensure that we always strive to better ourselves. If the ideal is easily reachable, then once a person has attained it, he will feel content, and contentment will set him off on a downward slide. Because our ideal is high, we are always in a state of aspiration. We are perpetually in a state of effort, striving and spiritual development. Should *kibr* arise in this state, it can only be an act of Shaytan, who is there just to test whatever one has achieved in the field of knowledge or action. *Kibr* will destroy whatever you have achieved, so protect yourself against it. Remember that it comes in very attractive, very concealed and very deceptive channels and forms. So, be ever vigilant.

The characteristics of a Believer whose heart is free of pride and filled with *ikhlas* and humility are described in a *hadith qudsi*. Allah Most High has said:

Truly, of those devoted to Me, the one I most favour is a believer who is of meagre means and much given to Prayer, who has been particular in the worship of his Lord and has obeyed Him inwardly, who was obscure among people and not pointed out, and whose sustenance was just sufficient to provide for him yet he bore this patiently.
Then he [i.e. the Prophet] rapped with his hand and said: Death will have come early to him, his mourners will have been few, his estate scant. (*Tirmidhi*.)

You should thus strive to become like one who doggedly keeps on working for the cause of Allah. You may not necessarily read details of him in newspaper columns, nor does he appear on television screens, nor does he win applause by making beautiful speeches in large gatherings and commendations for writing good pieces. He is not plagued by doubts. He does not waver in the face of defeat and failure. He does not calculate the chances of success but he knows very well that the only chance of success for him is to do his duty, and do it to the best of his ability. He is the

backbone of the Islamic work and the Muslim *Umma.*

2. Hypocrisy

Another evil that destroys all that the Believer has achieved, or is trying to achieve, is *nifaq*. *Nifaq* entails hypocrisy, showing off, and pretending to have what one does not possess. The Prophet condemned this in the strongest terms. He said:

Whoever prays to show off, he is [a sort of] idolater, for he makes a god beside Allah; whoever fasts to show off, he also makes a god beside Allah; and whoever gives charity to show off; he too makes a god beside Allah. (*Ahmad*.)

He also said:

Three characteristics are the signs of a hypocrite, even if he fasts, performs the Prayer and claims that he is a Muslim: when he speaks, he lies; when he makes a promise, he breaks it; and when he is trusted, he betrays his trust. (*Bukhari, Muslim*.)

Hypocrisy serves only to cloud your consciousness of Allah. It is a moral ailment which eats away one's character as a moth eats away cloth. *Nifaq* is the opposite of *ikhlas* whereas *ikhlas* is the most essential ingredient of faith and good deeds. You should therefore assess your motives and actions frequently.

3. Pessimism

A third danger is that of *qunut* or pessimism. You must try to rid yourself of *qunut*, the feeling of hopelessness and pessimism. Allah calls *qunut* an act of *kufr* or disbelief and rejection: He says: *who despairs of the mercy of his Lord, those who go astray*? [al-Hijr 15: 56.]

If you have tried and failed a hundred times, your efforts would still have won incalculable gains. The feeling of disappointment and pessimism and of losing heart should never occur. The promise of Allah is true and will come to pass: *And those who strive in Our way We will certainly guide them to Our paths*. [at-Ankabut 29:69.] Always adopt a hopeful and positive outlook. Be an eternal optimist.

4. Uncontrollable Anger

A fourth danger is that of uncontrollable anger. Once you begin to truly `hold onto Allah' you will find that life becomes pleasant and easy. To work for the cause of Islam becomes a joy. Inter-personal disputes, family problems and organisational problems will be resolved amicably. Most problems which persist in affecting our social relationships and organisations are due to lack of sincerity and lack of exclusiveness for Allah.

If you begin to do everything for Him, there is no need to be angry if somebody insults you since he or she cannot harm you at all. Only Allah's displeasure can harm you. Remember the words of Allah:

Never let your enmity for anyone lead you into the sin of deviating from justice. Always be just: that is closest to being God-fearing [al-Maida 5:8.]

Why should you become angry? Uncontrollable anger and unnecessary rudeness and disputes that

take place are counter productive especially when you are working in a *jama'a*, hand-in-hand with your fellow Muslim brother and sister for the cause of Islam. Remember that we are working only to seek the pleasure of Allah. Do not ruin your good deeds by corrupting your heart with *kibr* and letting your *nafs* or selfish desires get the better of you. Identifying a practical method of controlling anger, the Prophet advised:

When one of you gets angry while he is standing, he should sit down. Then the anger [will] leave him, and if not, then he should lie down. (*Ahmad, Tirmidhi*.)

The Prophet also used to make *dua* constantly in order to avoid negative emotions and behaviour:

O Allah. Purify my heart from hypocrisy and my actions from ostentation. (*Bukhari*.)

O Allah, Sustain me with Your love and the love of one who loves You, and the love of that which will draw me near to Your love, and make Your love more dear to me than cool water. (*Bukhari*,)

There are many more Prayers and supplications of the Prophet for similar things. They are food for the soul, food for the *qalb* and a source of sustenance for living this worldly life, for doing business. for studying, for working, for bringing up children and for dawn. Remember, if we do things for worldly objects, these objects will perish and our own actions will also perish.

The parable of those who reject their Lord is that their works are as ashes on which the wind blows furiously on a tempestuous day. No power have they over what they have earned. That is the straying far, far [from the goal]. [Ibrahim 14: 18]

5. Abuse of the Tongue

A fifth danger is abuse of the tongue. We should be careful how we use our tongue for its misuse is the fastest way to Hellfire. Lying, slandering, backbiting and obscenity should never be part of our speech. We should be exceedingly careful with what we say about others. The Prophet said:

None of my Companions should tell me anything about anyone, for I like to meet [any one] of you with a clean heart. (*Abu Dawud*.)

Janna has been promised for those who are careful with their speech. The Prophet said:

Whoever can promise me that he will be virtuous with what is between his lips, and what is between his thighs; I promise that he will go to the Garden. (*Muslim*.)

The key to control of the tongue is to infuse our conversations with remembrance of Allah. The Prophet said in this regard:

Do not talk for long without remembering Allah, for talking much without remembering Allah is hardness of the heart. The most distant among man from Allah is one with a hardened heart. (*Tirmidhi*.)

6. Lustful Sexual Passions

The sixth and last impediment I wish to highlight is that of lustful sexual passions. Sex is a powerful

driving force that Allah has blessed us with. In the Quran, Allah praises *men who guard their sex organs* [an-Nur 24: 30], and *women who guard their sex organs* [an-Nur 24: 31]. Despite great temptations, true Believers are able to control their sexual desires and in the process preserve their chastity.

The abuse of one's sexual organs leading to either fornication or adultery (*zina*) is described in the Quran as a great abomination:

Do not come near zina for it is a foulness and an evil way. [al-Isra 17: 32]

The verse warns against approaching any avenue which excites passions, opens ways for illicit relations between a man and woman, and promotes indecency and obscenity. For this reason we are advised by Allah and His Prophet to observe the following regulations:

- We should seek to get married if we are in a position to do so. The Prophet said: 'O young men! Those of you who can support a wife should marry, for it keeps you from looking at women and preserves your chastity.' (*Bukhari*.) If you are unable to get married, you should fast regularly for this will assist in controlling your sexual desires. The Prophet said: `O young men! You should marry. Whosoever cannot marry should fast, for fasting will lessen his desire'. (*Bukhari*.)

- We should strive to control all the parts of our body not just our genitals from *zina* or fornication. The Prophet said: `Every son of Adam has his share of fornication. The eyes fornicate and do so by looking. The hands fornicate and do so by touching. The feet fornicate and do so by walking [to an immoral act or place]. The mouth fornicates and does so by kissing. And the heart forms thoughts and wishes which the genitals confirm or deny.' (*Bukhari and Muslim*.) Thus the Prophet used to make *dua* continuously: `I seek refuge in Thee from the evil which may be in my ears, my eyes, my heart and my semen'. (*Abu Dawud*.)

- We should avoid looking at members of the opposite sex with desire. The Prophet considered lustful looks as the '*zina* of the eye', according to his saying: 'The eyes also commit *zina* and their *zina* is the lustful look' (*Bukhari*). He also said: 'A gaze is a poisoned arrow from Shaytan. Whoever abstains from it in fear of God shall receive from film an increase in faith, the sweetness of which he will feel in his heart.' (*Musnad* of *Ibn Hanbal*.)

- We should avoid looking at the *awra* or private parts of others. The Prophet forbade looking at the aura of another, whether of the same or the opposite sex, and whether with or without desire. He said: 'A man should not look at the *awra* of another man, nor a woman of a woman, nor should a man go under one cloth with another man, nor a woman with another woman. (*Muslim*.)

- We should observe the rule of *khalwa*. *Khalwa* or privacy denotes a man and woman being alone in a place in which there is no fear of intrusion by anyone else, so that an opportunity exists for sexual intimacy. Islam prohibits *khalwa* between a man and a woman who are outside the degree of *mahram* relationship. The reason for this is not a lack of trust but rather to protect ourselves from sexual temptation arising when we are alone with a member of the opposite sex. The Prophet said: `Whoever believes in God and the Last Day must never be in privacy with a woman without there being a *mahram* with her, for otherwise Shaytan will be the third present [with them].' (*Ahmad*.)

SUMMARY

The Quran has laid down certain guidelines for staying on the Straight Way. The first is to `hold on to Allah' and life's journey will be easy.

`Holding onto Allah' means that you must be grateful to Him for everything, worship only Him, love Him more than anything else, strive to become a *hanif,* and make jihad only for Him.

Likewise, be aware of the following impediments in `holding onto Allah': pride, hypocrisy, pessimism, uncontrollable anger, abuse of the tongue and lustful sexual passions.

May Allah guide us to the Straight Way for He guides whom He wills to the Straight Way. [Yunus 10:25.]

CHAPTER FOUR: `Relating to Allah's Messenger

THE Quran's major claim upon us is to put its teachings into practice for Allah demands the whole of our lives:

O you who have attained to faith! Surrender yourselves wholly unto God, and follow not Shaytan's footsteps, far, verily, he is your open foe. [al-Baqara 2: 208.]

The only way to live by the Quran is to live life as the Prophet Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, lived it, for his life was the Quran in practice. His example is the surest guide to its meaning and Message. If you want to `see' the Quran then look at the Prophet's life. For, as Sayyida Aisha said, 'his conduct was nothing but the Quran.' (*Muslim*.)

The best way to understand the Quran and follow its Message is to learn what the Prophet said, spend hours and hours in his company, follow his footsteps and cast yourself in the mould that he left behind.

The Quran provides the essential framework for human life. But the Prophet and his *Sunna* provide us with the details of that framework. The manner in which that structure is to be given shape in actuality, the method to be adopted in order to live by Divine guidance, and the wisdom that enables one to rise to all occasions and live through all situations in accordance with Allah's guidance.

If you desire to know what type of person the Quran wants you to be and what type of society the Quran wants you to create, you only need to look at the Prophet's life history.

Knowing, however, is not enough. We require inner strength to follow the Quranic teachings. We need to have the real flavour of faith inside our hearts. This strength comes out of the love that a Believer must have for Allah and His Messenger. Anas, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that the Prophet said:

There are three types of people who will experience the sweetness of faith: he to whom Allah and His Messenger are dearer than all else; he who loves a human being for Allah's sake alone; and he who has as great abhorrence of returning to unbelief after Allah has rescued him from it as he has of being cast into hell. (*Bukhari, Muslim*.)

This love is not merely the profession of faith. It is a love that supersedes all other types of love and a love that makes faith penetrate into the heart. It is through this love for God and His Messenger that one tastes the real sweetness of faith. The way to that love and the symbol of that love lies in following the footsteps of the Prophet who was commanded by Allah to say:

If you love Allah, follow me; Allah will love you and forgive you your sins. For Allah is Oft-Forgiving, most Merciful. [Ali Imran 3:31]

THE POSITION OF THE SUNNA IN A BELIEVER'S LIFE

By the time the Prophet, peace be on him, departed this world, there were thousands of people whose lives mirrored his life. He left behind a society whose every aspect carried his stamp. His guidance, his teachings, his actions and his sayings not only fashioned that society during his time, but also continued to influence it after he had died. He created a new society and led the creation of a new civilisation and culture out of the teachings of the Quran. This he did in accordance with the task given to him by Allah Himself.

O Messenger! Convey all that has been sent to you from your Lord. If you did not you would not have delivered His Message. [al-Maida 5: 67]

THE PROPHETS MISSION

Muhammad, upon whom be peace, was not simply a `Messenger' who brought a `Message'. His responsibility and his task went beyond merely conveying the word of Allah to mankind. He was assigned the duty of teaching the Book, the Law, and the Wisdom to people, purifying them and making them develop into the human beings that the Quran desired them to be.

In many places in the Quran, these duties have been explicitly mentioned. In the very first part of *Sura al-Baqara*, Prophet Ibrahim, on whom be peace, prayed for a new Messenger:

Our Lord! Raise up in the midst of our offspring a Messenger from among them who shall recite to them Your verses and instruct them in the Book and in Wisdom and purify their lives. Verily, You are Mighty, Wise. [al-Baqara 2:129]

In the above verse, four duties of the Prophet are mentioned:

- to convey the Message of the Quran to people;
- to instruct them in the Scripture which means the `code of law' for human life;
- to teach them wisdom, through which life can make its journey in the light of the Quranic teachings;
- to vain them in self-purification

His mission, therefore, was not merely to convey the Quran. He was designated to explain it and provide the guidance for day-to-day situations as the movement he led progressed from one stage to another.

In other places in the Quran, [See Quran: 33: 4-5; 5: 67; 2: 151; 48: 28; 9: 33; 61: 9; 7: 157.] Allah has described his mission and duty as:

- *Indhar* (warning)
- *Tabshir* (bringing glad tidings)
- *Dawa* (inviting and calling)
- *Tabligh* (communicating)
- *Tadhkir* (reminding)
- *Talim* (teaching)
- *Tilawa* (conveying and propagating)
- *Amr bil-maruf wa nahi anil munkar* (enjoining and promoting what is good and right and forbidding and eradicating what is bad and wrong)
- *Iqama* (establishing the *Din* or way of life)
- *Qist* (establishing justice)

-*Izhar* (making Divine guidance prevail)

-*Shahada* (witnessing)

All these expressions pertain to the same mission, though from different perspectives and with different emphases.

The Prophet was also given the authority to make things permissible and to make things prohibited: *Adopt what the Messenger gives you and refrain from what he prohibits you*. [al-Hashr 59: 7.] And he had this authority from none other than Allah.

It was to accomplish these duties assigned to him that the Prophet Muhammad spent his whole life in changing people's behaviour and establishing a new society. The Quran accords him a unique position which no one else can ever have. *Whoever obeys the Messenger, indeed, he has obeyed Allah*. [an-Nisa 4: 80.] *Those who gave their hands in pledge to you, indeed they gave their hands in pledge to Allah.* [al-Fath 48: 10.]

Once the Prophet has given his decision and his judgment, no believing man or woman has any right to question, doubt, disobey, or harbour any feeling of disapproval. They must submit totally and willingly to him.

It is not fitting for a Believer, man or woman, when a matter has been decided by Allah and His Messenger, to have any option about their decision. If any disobeys Allah, and His Messenger, he is, indeed, on a clearly wrong path. [al-Alazab 33: 36]

In the life of the Prophet, according to the Quran, lies the most beautiful and the most perfect example to follow:

You have, indeed, in the Messenger of Allah an excellent exemplar, for whoever hopes for Allah and the Last Day and remembers Allah much. [al-Ahzab 33: 21.]

GUIDELINES IN STUDYING THE SUNNA

One may ask where can the *Sunna* be found for there are so many books and traditions circulated. What the Prophet has left behind however, is not merely a record of what be did or what he said. He left behind him living human beings and a living society. It is through these living human beings and through this society that one can find the *Sunna.* The degree of homogeneity, conformity, and consistency that you find in this *Umma*, even after 1,400 years, are because of this *Sunna*.

You may walk into any masjid from Indonesia to Washington and you will find the rites and rituals of the formal acts of worship and the language of Prayer almost identical. You may walk into any Muslim home and you will find every Muslim eating with his right hand. Why? Because that is the *Sunna* left behind by the Prophet.

These examples may seem trivial but my purpose in citing them is to point out that even on the minutest of details, uniformity exists in the Muslim *Umma* and this is due to the *Sunna*. If the *Sunna* is given up as a source of guidance and if the Quran is separated from the *Sunna*, then this Muslim society that has existed for over fourteen hundred years, through many periods of severe strains and tests and tribulations, would disintegrate. It would then be relatively easy for foreign cultures and societies to assimilate it. What gives Muslim society and Muslim communities a distinct identity and colour of their own is the pattern left behind by the Prophet.

THE SUNNA IN THE CONTEXT OF WESTERN SOCIETY

Muslims in Western societies live in a culture which is `alien' in its spirit. To live in this type of culture is your own choice and your own decision. In many instances, you have no other option for the West is your home. Unfortunately, the same can be said for people living in Muslim countries since Western culture is slowly weaving its way and replacing genuine Islamic culture in these countries also.

To survive and prosper in western society requires great courage to stand up for your beliefs and ideals. You need to have a clear appreciation of the true nature of Islamic culture. The true spirit of Islamic culture lies in an understanding that the 'real' realities of life are all beyond the perception of physical senses. The beginning of *Sura al-Baqara* states that its guidance is for: *Those who believe in al-ghayb* [what lies beyond the perception of physical senses). [al-Baetara 2:4]

So all that is 'real'-Allah, His Angels, Prophethood, the Day of Judgment, Heaven and Hell - are all beyond any measure of physical testing. They all lie beyond human capability to see them, to smell them, to measure them, or to find their real situation.

Western culture as it exists and as it has spread now throughout the world, in this 'global village', has perpetuated the view that, only that which can be materially measured or found out is 'real'. Whatever cannot be measured has no value. Therefore, both Islamic and western cultures are diametrically opposed.

Once you have chosen to live in a 'Western type' society, the only source of light for you is the Messenger of Allah. He was also faced with an almost similar situation. As he came down from the cave of Hira, after his experience of receiving the light of Divine guidance, be re-entered a culture

and society which were quite 'alien' to his Message. His Message began by linking the whole of life to the name of Allah. That was the starting point. All knowledge, all culture, all civilisation and all human action must be centred on one pivot and that is the name of Allah. This was a totally strange Message for the society in which he had to operate. So, we need to look at the Prophet's *Sunna* in the context of operating in an `alien' society and see how we can practise a genuine Islamic culture.

THE REAL MEANING OF THE TERM SUNNA

The technical definition of *Sunna* is all that the Prophet did, said, or approved. When the term *Sunna* is used, our minds are diverted immediately to the manners and morals which we are so careful to observe, while dressing and eating, walking and praying.

I have no intention of belittling the importance of these relatively minor acts that he left behind. It reminds me of a beautiful incident from his life. A man and his son came to meet the Prophet. As he came out of his house, the buttons of his shirt were open. Both of them shook his hand and went away. That was the only occasion in their lives when they came face to face with the Prophet. But, for their entire lives they always kept the buttons of their shirts open - not because it was obligatory, but once you fall in love with someone, each and every action that he does, and each and every thing that he says, becomes dear to the heart. It has to be followed.

If, however, you consider the technical definition of *Sunna*, and if you look at the life of the Prophet from the moment he received revelation in the cave of Hira till he breathed his last in Madina, what is it that stands out as his most dominant concern and his main activity? The most outstanding feature of his life was that every moment was spent in *dawa,* in inviting his fellow human beings to live in submission to their Creator. He lived

every moment of his life in purifying individuals and making them grow in their love and submission to Allah. Every moment of his life, he talked about and carried out his mission. In the streets of Makka, in the valley of Taif, on the battlegrounds of Badr and Hunayn, and to the totality of affairs of Madina - *dawa* was his essential concern. That was his essential *Sunna.*

YOUR MISSION

Dawa is the first and most important duty for Muslims today. In your daily affairs, it is the *Sunna* that must be uppermost in your mind and heart. It must make the greatest claim on your time and wealth.

Secondly, while living in an 'alien' culture, you have to preserve your Islamic identity - not only through rational arguments, but through emotional, cultural, and civilisational symbols. It is only the *Sunna* that can provide these emotional and civilisational symbols through which you will not only preserve your identity but strengthen and advance it.

Thirdly, it is the youth who must claim your major attention for that is also the *Sunna* of the Prophet. They were the people who had the energies and capabilities to carry the burden of his mission.

Fourthly, in a society where so many misgivings about Islam prevail, where Islam has been misrepresented and distorted so widely, your conduct must be a living example of that mercy to mankind, just as the Prophet was *rahmatun lil-alamin* a mercy to the worlds.

We sent you not but as a mercy for all the worlds. [al-Anbiya 21: 107.]

The Prophet Muhammad was such a model of mercy that he declared that removing an obstacle

from another's path leads one into Paradise; to quench the thirst of a dog entitles one to enter Paradise; and to tie a cat until he dies makes one deserve Hell-fire. Such was the mercy of his *uswa*, his living example. You will only be able to invite people to Islam if you follow his example.

SUMMARY

We must recognise the unique position that the Prophet must occupy in our lives as a focus of our love and obedience and as an ideal we must follow.

Our biggest challenge is to fulfill our role as ambassadors of the last Ambassador of Allah to mankind for all times. By our words and deeds, by our example of integrity and compassion, we must make our neighbours understand who Muhammad, peace be upon him, was and what his Message for mankind was.

In this process, we must be the embodiment of mercy that the Prophet was. In this way we will create a new future by making the new generation a living example of his *Sunna.* Then, perhaps, our presence in this world will prove a great blessing, not only for the Muslim community, but for all mankind.

CHAPTER FIVE: Spending in the Way of Allah

WHATEVER you give or spend in the way of Allah will be returned to you in manifold increase. Allah, the most Bountiful and the most Loving, commends:

Lend unto God a goodly loan. Whatever good you shall forward on your behalf you shall find it with God, as better and richer in reward. [al-Muzzammil 73: 20.]

Be generous, therefore, for whatever you spend on yourself is only for your temporary sustenance while whatever you spend in the way of Allah is an investment in your future for which will provide everlasting sustenance. Seek to invest in others for your own benefit with whatever Allah has endowed you.

Sadaqa or charity, of course, is not compulsory. What is obligatory, however, is *Zakat*, a fixed percentage of your *halal* or lawful savings which is meant to purify your wealth by recognising that the needy has a right over a portion of it. Indeed, the very meaning of the term *Zakat* signifies purification. Allah says: *Of their wealth take alms to purify and sanctify them*. [at-Tawba 9:103.] Furthermore: *He that spends his possessions* [on others] *so that he might grow in purity*. [al-Layl 92: 18.]

Love for worldly possessions is primarily a disease of the heart while the purpose of *sadaqa* is to act as its antidote or cure. *Sadaqa* serves as a form of *dhikr* to remind us that all forms of wealth come from Allah and what we possess is .simply a short term loan for which we will be held accountable

when our contract expires. This loan is meant to cater for our personal needs and family needs and those of the wider society.

SPENDING ON FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS

Spending on those in need is a highly commendable form of *ibada* or worship. The Prophet Muhammad declared:

A generous person is close to Allah, close to Paradise, close to people, and far from Hell. However, a miserly person is far from Allah, far from Paradise, far from people, but close to Hell. Allah loves more an ignorant man who is generous than a worshipper who is miserly. (*Tirmidhi*.)

We should not, of course, expect any favours from those who receive our *sadaqa*. Neither should we expect that they will be grateful and kind to us and give something to us in return, nor should we be motivated by a desire for any other worldly reward. Concerning our attitude to giving Allah reminds us: *O you who believe, make not your charity worthless by reminders of your generosity, and by causing vexation*. [at-Baqara 2: 264.] Our *sadaqa* should be *qard hasan*, a loan given for the sake of Allah without expectation of profit. The Quran describes the attitude of those who give to the needy as follows:

And they feed, for the love of Allah, the indigent, the orphan, and the captive [saying], *'We feed you for the sake of Allah alone: No reward do we desire of you nor thank*,. [ad-Dahr 76: 8-9.]

Their reward is sought from Allah rather than mortals. And whose gratitude and return can be greater for us than Allah's, given out of love and mercy for us?

Instead of hoping for some worldly benefit from our *sadaqa*, we should be grateful to those who accept our *sadaqa*, for they have given us an opportunity to invest our wealth in a `business venture' with Allah who has promised in return a reward `seven hundred times greater'. *The parable of those who spend their wealth in the array of Allah is that of a grain, out of which grow seven ears, in every ear hundred grains*. [al-Baqara 2: 261.]

Just imagine if such an investment was offered to you by a company- you would rush to put every penny you possess into it when you consider the magnitude of profit to be made. To invest in Allah's `business venture' requires the certainty of faith, which affirms that there is a `real' reward available for you to receive. Of this reward, the Quran declares: *Allah has purchased of the believers their persons and their goods; for theirs* [in return] *is the Garden*. [at Tawba 9:111.]

When a Believer attains the certainty and faith that his real reward lies in the Life to Come, his heart becomes enlarged with generosity and love for his fellow men and his giving knows no bounds. In return, Allah promises ease for him in all his efforts until he reaches eternal bliss.

Surely, your striving is to diverse ends. And for him who gives, is God-conscious and believes are the Truth -for him shall We make easy the path towards ease. But, as for him who is niggardly, behaves as if he is self-sufficient and denies the Truth-for him shall We make easy the path towards hardship. [al-Layl 92:4-10.]

The Prophet, upon whom be peace, was the most generous person in his community. It was his

unique sense of generosity and affection which captivated the hearts of the people and brought them into the fold of Islam. His example was the most important form of *dawa*. Imam Bukhari has recorded that the close Companion of the Prophet, Jabir, testified that he never observed the Prophet refusing anyone who requested something from him. The Prophet, upon whom be peace, has himself testified: `If I had a mountain of gold, I would not like to save any of it for more than three days, except something I put aside to pay debts' (*Bukhari*). The magnanimity of the blessed Prophet is the example we must strive to follow.

SPENDING FOR THE CAUSE OF ISLAM

Spending on fellow human beings -family, relatives, the needy, the orphan, the destitute - is one aspect of *infaq fi sabilillah* or spending in the way of God. There is also another - that is, spending for the cause of Islam. When you spend for the cause of Islam, Allah adopts another manner of asking for it: *Who is there who will give a loan to Me?* [al-Hadid 57: 11.] Just imagine His generosity. It is His wealth, it belongs to Him. Even if He asks us for it without offering any reward, He will be justified in doing so but yet He is prepared to buy back His own property so that you may again reap its benefits and gain a noble reward.

Consider our attitude when we are asked to contribute for the cause of Islam. We are miserly. We will spend one-hundredth of what we spend on our homes, our children, our clothes and food for the cause of Islam. *Sura al-Hadid* goes on to invite those who clams to be Muslims to become true Believers and to give their lives and their possessions and belongings in the way of Allah. Finally, it invites Muslims to give a good loan to Allah which he will multiply many times and return with a noble reward:

One day we shall see the believing men and believing women with their Light running before them and on their right A glad tiding for you today, gardens underneath which rivers flow, therein to abide forever. This a the supreme triumph.

On that day hypocrites, both men and women, shall speak unto those Believers; `Wait for us. Let us have light from your light.' But they will be told: `Turn back and seek a light of your own.' And thereupon a wall will be raised between them with a gate in it. Inside it will be mercy and outside the wall will be suffering and punishment.

Those who will be outside will call out to those who -would be inside `Were we not with you?' To which the others will answer: Yes, indeed, but you allowed yourself to be tempted and you were hesitant and you were in doubt and your wishful thinking

deceived you until Allah's command came to pass. For, indeed the deceiver deceived you concerning Allah. And so, no ransom shall be accepted today from you and neither from those who disbelieved Your abode is the fire. It is your only refuge, and how evil a journey's end. '

Is it not time that the hearts of all those who have believed should feel humbled at the remembrance of Allah and of all the truth that has been given to them, lest they become like those who were granted revelation before and whose hearts have hardened with the passage of time, so that many of them have now become Iniquitous?

But, know that Allah gives life to the earth after it has been lifeless! We have, indeed, made Our Messages clear unto you, so that you might use your reason.

Verily, as for men and women who accept the Truth as true, and who offer up unto Allah a goodly loan, they will be amply repaid, and shall have a noble reward [in the Life to Come]. [al-Hadid 57: 12-18]

The above verses describe a vivid and graphic scene concerning the Last Day, *Yawm al-Qiyama*. It concerns two groups of people, those who are true Believers and those who are shaky, hesitant and

doubtful in their commitment to their faith and to our Creator.

The first verse describes the group of believing men and women. They will have a *Nur* or Light which will be in front of them and on their right. With that Light they will journey to their destination and they will be greeted with glad tidings of beautiful gardens in which they will live forever- that will be the highest possible achievement for which they can hope.

The first point we may note is that both men and women are mentioned in the verse separately. This means that as far as the demands and duties of this world and eligibility for the rewards in the Life to Come are concerned, there is no difference between men and women. Both men and women will possess the Light for their journey.

Then, the Quran focuses the narrative on the second group, the hypocrites and miserly ones - both men and women -who will not possess the Light. Those who were niggardly and did not believe in the promises made by Allah will cry out to the true Believers for their bounty - but, it will be too late to benefit from the generosity of others. A wall will arise separating the generous ones from the miserly. The generous ones will find shelter in Allah's *rahma*, while the miserly ones and the hypocrites will be on the side of Allah's wrath. A dialogue will then commence between the two groups. Ibn Kathir elaborates the conversation in a very vivid manner. The miserly and the hypocrites will be saying:

`Were we not with you? Did we not go with you to the Friday Prayers? And did we not attend with you the congregations? And did we not do other things with you? Did we not fight side by side with you in the battles? So, why are you now leaving us behind?' The true Believers will reply, `Yes, indeed, you were with us. But you were with us only outwardly, with your bodies, but not with your intentions and with your commitments. And you allowed yourselves to be tempted away by these worldly things which you considered to be dearer, more valuable for you in life. You were more concerned about your families, you were more concerned about amassing wealth, you were more concerned about making life comfortable and you were more concerned about building up a good life in the world. And so, all these worldly things, once they became the medium and vehicle for taking you away from the Right Path, led you to this position. And you waited and you hesitated'.

If we reflect on the whole scene, we will find that there is mention of a gate in the wall. If we believe that all that is going to happen in the *Akhira* is a result of what happens today, it means that although there is a wall which separates the sincere from the insincere, and the true Believers from the hypocrites-there is always a door between the two groups that can be opened.

If, today, someone makes a decision to step inside that door it requires two things: a will and a step, and then you are inside, near the mercy of Allah. The time to walk through that door is today and not tomorrow, because tomorrow that door may not be open. But today, despite all the walls that may separate the sincere from the insincere and the generous from the miserly, the door for *istighfar* and *tawba* is open. The door for turning back is open and the door to make a decision and so become sincere to your commitment is also open.

Now is the time to commit yourself to Islam and to become sincere. You must ensure that your whole life is based on spending for the cause of Islam by giving your time, attention, heart and mind - utilising the faculties of speaking, writing, reasoning and intelligence that Allah has bestowed on you for the establishment of His *Din* or way of life. Only then will you attain the highest station of faith:

Never will you attain the highest degree of virtue unless you spend [freely] *in the cause of Allah out*

of that which you love; and whatever you spend Allah surely knows it well. [Ali Imran 3: 93.]

THE SMALL CHARITY

We should never consider any charity too small or not worth doing or giving. Even meeting your Muslim brother or sister with a smiling face or giving a good word of encouragement and praise are acts of *sadaqa*. Adi bin Hatim has related that the Prophet Muhammad said:

Every one of you will certainly meet Allah. On the day that he meets Him, there will be no curtain between them, nor any interpreter. He shall then say, `Did I not send you a Messenger who was conveying the Message to you?' He will reply, `Certainly'. He shall then say, `Did I not give you property and show favour on you?' He will reply, "Certainly'. Then he will look to his right and see only *Jahannam* and he will look to his left and see only *Jahannam* [Then the Prophet said] Guard against the fire, even though it be with half a date. And, if anyone does not have even that much, he should do so with a good word. (*Bukhari*.)

Some people have so narrow a view that they cannot bring themselves round to even utter a kind and pleasant word. The Messenger of Allah has said: `Do not belittle even the smallest act of kindness, even if it were no more than meeting your brother with a smiling and cheerful face.' (*Muslim*.)

It will not cost a penny to say a good word, but so miserly we have may become that we are not even prepared to utter a word of kindness, praise and encouragement. It will make a lot of difference to our spouses, siblings, and neighbours - be they Muslim or non-Muslim- if we were to be loving and kind in all our inter-personal relationships.

MODES OF GIVING

Your *din* or way of life can be one of two types: one way of life is to look after your own self interests and the other way is to seek to improve the welfare of others, even at your own expense, in order to earn the pleasure of Allah. These are two diametrically opposed ways of thinking, behaving and living. Now the way to Allah is the way of giving. The Prophet made a comparison of the two different personalities as follows:

The case of a miser and a generous one is like that of two people who are clad in steel armour from their breasts up to their collar bones. When the generous one spends, his armour expands until it covers his fingers and his toes. When the miser makes up his mind to spend something every ring of the amour sinks into his flesh. He tries to loosen it but it is not loosened. (*Bukhari, Muslim*.)

Wealth and possessions are a *baraka* or blessing from Allah when used in a productive way to earn the pleasure of Allah. Otherwise, it can be our worst enemy, a curse. As soon as we realise that everything belongs to Allah and that the things that we are going to receive in the *Akhira* depend on how much we spend in the *Dunya*, it will become easier to give freely from our pockets. Giving and sacrificing will become a pleasure rather than a burden.

For most of our life, we work hard to earn money in order to build bank balances and to buy houses. These are all commendable acquisitions - in moderation. Remember that you may have a house with one hundred rooms, but you can sleep in only one room. You may have one hundred dresses in your wardrobe, but at any one time you can wear only a single dress. You may have one hundred dishes

laid on the table, but you cannot eat more than will fill your one stomach. Even that may be difficult for you to digest. Always remember the *hadith*: `Self-sufficiency does not mean plenty of provisions; it means self sufficiency of the spirit.' (*Bukhari*.) All those extravagant things that deceive you are not worth pursuing or living for.

Say: if it be that your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your mates, or your kindred; the wealth that you have gained; the commerce in which you fear a decline; or t wanwellings in which you delight are dearer to you than Allah, or his Messenger, or the striving in His Cause - then wait until Allah brings about His Decision: and Allah guides not the rebellious. [at Tawba 9: 24.]

LOVE OF THIS WORLD

I am not saying that you should not enjoy the `good things of this world'. Rather, we must work hard for them because nothing good comes without genuine effort. Abu Bakr as-Siddiq said: `Your religion is your future and your money is your livelihood: there is no good in a man with no money in his name.' We should therefore live this life fully. We should be interested in it. As Allah encourages us:

Seek, by means of what Allah has granted you, the life to come. and forget not your share of the present world; and do good as Allah has done good to you; and seek not to spread corruption on earth. [al-Qasas 28: 77.]

In addition, the Prophet informed us that wealth can also serve to increase our *taqwa:* `What a good helper is wealth in maintaining God-consciousness.' (*Kanz al-Ummal*.) He also said: `Anyone who acquires it [wealth] lawfully and spends it lawfully, for him it is the best helper.' (*Muslim*.)

Thus, all the good things in life must be pursued, but not the love of this world. There is no true enjoyment of the good of this world if we do not adequately prepare our home in the Next world. Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz used to repeat the following verse unceasingly: 'There is no good in the life of a man for whom Allah has appointed no share in the everlasting abode.'

The love that we should desire is the love of the *Akhira*: For this to be achieved, *the love of Allah and His Messenger must be dearer to you than all else* [al-Baqara 2: 165]. This will earn you the pleasures of this world and of the next. When the Prophet was requested by one Companion to tell him of some deeds which will make him earn the love of Allah, as well as that of other people, he replied, `Do not covet this world, and Allah will love you; do not covet what people possess, and people will love you'. (*Bukhari*.)

It is not the amount of money that you possess which matters in the eyes of Allah. Rather, He wants you to rid yourself of the love for that money. If a person has one pound only, but his heart is in that one pound, then he is a man of this world. On the contrary, if he has 100,000 pounds and his heart is not in those pounds and he is prepared to part with it whenever it is required, then he is not a man of this world; he is a highly spiritual man. Similarly, if you earn £10 and give £5 in charity, this is much more precious in the eyes of Allah than someone who earns £100,000 and gives £1,000. The first person has given half of his wealth while the second has given one-hundredth of what he has earned.

In the time of the Prophet, those who possessed firm conviction in Allah's promises would bring

everything they had in their homes and put it at the feet of the Prophet. It is of the *Sahaba* and their selfless sacrifices that the Quran says: *They give preference over their own selves, even when they themselves are destitute*. [al-Hashr 59: 9.]

If you truly seek the pleasures and rewards of the Hereafter, spend, *infaq fi sabilillah*! This is one of the most effective ways of ridding ourselves of the love for the *Dunya* and acquiring a love for the Hereafter. It is indeed an important instrument of *tazkiya* as the Quran declares:

And the likeness of those who spend their substance, seeking to please Allah and to strengthen their souls, is as a garden high and fertile: heavy rainfalls on it, but makes it yield a double increase in harvest. [al-Baqara 2: 265.]

While spending in the way of Allah, you must give as much as you can give, but do so with moderation. The Quran exhorts us to be like *those who are neither extravagant nor niggardly in spending but keep a balance between the two.* [al-Furqan 25: 67.]

There are also two important things you must take care to avoid when giving to those in need. One is that of *kibr* or pride and the other is *riya* or show. Giving with pride in your heart and actions will only consume your good deeds while spending to seek the attention of others will corrupt your pure intentions and make your actions worthless in the eyes of Allah.

The battle to part with what you possess is one that you will experience each day until your meeting with your Lord. It is an ongoing war between the temptations of this world and our conviction in the rewards of the *Akhira.*

This world is filled with beauty and attractions but the *Akhira* is filled with beauty unimaginable. The Quran has made a comparison between both worlds.

Alluring has been made for people the love of desires for women, and children, and heaped up treasures of gold and silver, and horses of high ranks, and cattle, and farms. But all that may be enjoyed only in the present life - whereas, the best resort is with Allah. Say: Shall I tell you of better things than these [earthly joys]? *For the God-conscious there are with their Lord, gardens through which waters flow, therein to abide for ever, and pure spouses, and Allah's good pleasure.* [Ali Imran 3: 14-15.]

FORGIVING OTHERS

Sadaqa also has no value without love and sympathy. The Quran states: *Kind words and the covering of faults are better than charity followed by injury.* [al-Baqara 2:263] Those who are generous forgive people for their mistakes. The Prophet reminded us: 'If one gives charity it does not diminish his wealth; if one forgives others, Allah bestows more honour on him; and if one humbles himself for Allah's sake, He exalts him higher.' (*Muslim*.) The Quran also mentions both giving and forgiving together: *And compete with one another for your Lord's forgiveness and a Paradise as vast as the heavens and earth prepared for the God-fearing, who give generously whether in times of plenty or in times of hardship, and hold in check their anger, and pardon their fellow human beings; Allah loves such doers of good.* [Ali Imran 3:133-134]

Spending in the way of Allah is closely related to controlling anger and forgiving people. All come from a big heart. The Prophet said: `Two of the qualities which Allah loves are gentleness and endurance.' (*Bukhari*.) When your heart becomes big enough to forgive the faults of others, Allah has promised for you the reward of *Janna*.

The wronged one who endures with fortitude and forgiveness indeed achieves a matter of high resolve. [ash-Shura 42:43]

SUMMARY

Whatever you can give, spend. Spend on your family and those in need. but be even more generous in spending for the cause of Islam. Remember that the time to commit yourself to Islam is now. Utilise all the resources at your disposal: time, attention, heart and mind, faculties of speaking, writing, reasoning and intelligence that Allah has bestowed on you for the establishment of His *Din*. Do not let the love of this world beguile you. Be forgiving and accommodating to your fellow human beings if you want to earn the forgiveness and mercy of Allah.

May Allah enable us to detach ourselves not from this world, but from the love of this world. May He help us to spend of that which He has bestowed on us for out own benefit.

ALLAH has laid down certain rights and duties between people and between all of His living creation. Parents and children, wife and husband, brother and sister, neighbours, Muslim and non- Muslim, employer and employee, even animals are all included in this wide range of rights and obligations. In this interdependent world, every person is responsible for those under his care. The Prophet Muhammad said:

Every one of you is a shepherd and every one of you is responsible for his flock. A ruler is shepherd over his people and he is accountable for their welfare. A man is shepherd over his family and he is accountable for their welfare. A woman is shepherdess over her husband's household and children and she is accountable for their welfare. A man's servant is shepherd over his master's property and he is accountable for it. Be careful! All of you are shepherds and all of you shall be accountable for your flocks. (*Bukhari, Muslim*.)

The Quran also informs us that we must be compassionate with each other and generous in our giving:

Worship and serve Allah alone and make no gods beside Him; and do good to your parents, relatives, the orphans, the needy, the neighbour who is a relative, the neighbour who is a stranger, and the companion by your side, and the wayfarer, and those you rightfully possess; for Allah does not love the proud and boastful, those who are niggerdly and urge others to be niggardly. [an-Nisa 4:36-37]

The injunctions of the *Sharia* or Islamic moral and legal code relating to rights and duties are usually divided into two categories: the rights of Allah together with our duties towards Him and the rights of Allah's servants together with their duties towards mankind. This classification is meant to simplify our understanding of our obligations but the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, taught us that Allah would Himself be claimant on behalf of those whose rights have not been honoured on the Day of Judgment. A *hadith qudsi* states:

The Messenger of Allah said: Allah will say, `Son of Adam, I fell ill but you did not visit Me.' He will say, 'O Lord, and how could I have visited you! You are the Lord of the worlds!' He will say, 'Did you not know that My servant so-and-so had fallen ill and you did not visit him? Did you not know that if you had visited him you would have found Me with him?'

`Son of Adam, I asked you for food but you did not feed Me'. He will say, 'O Lord, how could I have fed You! You are the Lord of the worlds!' He will say, 'Did you not know that My servant so-and-so had asked you for food and you did not feed him? Did you not know that if you had fed him you would surely have found Me with him?'

`Son of Adam, I asked you to give Me drink but you did not give Me'. He will say, `O Lord, how could I have given You drink! You are the Lord of the worlds!' He will say, `My servant so-and-so had asked you to give him drink and you did not give him. Had you fed him you would surely have found Me with him.' (*Muslim*.)

So, Allah regards the rights and duties that He has defined between His creation as His rights and duties. The Messenger of Allah has said: `All creatures are Allah's family; and Allah loves most those who treat his family well and kindly.' (*Bayhaqi*)

THE REGISTERS OF DEEDS

In a *hadith* narrated by Sayyida Aisha, the Prophet said that all the deeds that we perform are written down in three registers:

- One register contains the deeds of those who have associated partners with Allah. Allah will not forgive those who commit ,shirk or polytheism. He forgives all sins except shirk.

- The second register contains those deeds that Allah will not forgive, unless they have been compensated for. These are the ones between fellow human beings.

- The third register contains the deeds about our personal duties to Allah. They are the deeds between man and his Creator like *Salat* and *Sawm* Allah determines whether they are forgiven or not.

The second register of deeds is especially important for us to consider because there is no Divine pardon in cases where personal rights have been violated. Forgiveness can only come from the person concerned - either directly or when Allah makes it possible for that person to grant a pardon. The Prophet Muhammad said in this regard:

Whoever is guilty of doing some wrong against a fellow human being, whether in regard to his honour or anything else, he should obtain his forgiveness before the Day of judgment, when there will be no money to pay for it. If he has any good deeds to his credit, they will be taken away from him to the extent of his wrongdoing. And if he has no good deeds, the sins of the wronged-one will be taken and put on him. (*Bukhari*.)

OBLIGATIONS T0 YOUR FAMILY

Your first obligation after satisfying your personal needs is to your family: *O you who believe! Save yourself and your family , from a fire whose fuel is men and stones*. [at-Tahrim 66: 6]

Fulfillment of your responsibilities towards your family is certainly an onerous task which requires a considerable amount of effort and time on your part. This task can be made easier, more rewarding and indeed more satisfying if you are careful in following the guidelines set out by the Prophet in the selection of your marriage partners.

When choosing your prospective spouse, ensure that you check your *niyya* or intention. Remind yourself that in seeking to get married you are fulfilling an obligation [an-Nur 24: 32-33], and in so doing you are also following a very strong tradition of the Prophet. Imam Bukhari narrated that the Prophet strongly advised all young people who possess the means to get married, to do so. Marriage will in turn assist you in safeguarding your chastity and hopefully, increase your *iman* and commitment to Islam. The Prophet further commented on the benefits of a blessed marriage as follows: `Whoever is granted a righteous wife by Allah, Allah has helped him in half of his faith. So let him fear Allah in the remaining half.' (*Tabarani*.) This exhortation, of course, applies equally to both men and women.

Your choice of spouse should be based foremost on the merit of *taqwa*. Take time to make the best choice, for this too, is an investment in your future and that of your `future' children, *insha'Allah*

Accordingly, the Messenger of God said:

Do not marry women for their beauty, maybe their beauty will lead them to destruction; and do not marry them for their wealth, maybe their wealth will cause them to become haughty. But marry them for their *taqwa* (piety). A wide-nose, clumsy slave woman who possesses faith is better [than the above categories]. (*Ibn Majah*.)

Look for a partner who will bring comfort to your eyes, one who has a pure heart and one who will encourage you and participate in your *dawa* work [ar-Rum 30: 21]. In this way, not only will you benefit from the *baraqa* or blessing of Allah in your *dawa* efforts, but your home will also be filled with the *Nur* of Allah and become a source of inspiration for your efforts [al-Araf 7: 189]. For this reason, we are told in the Quran that the *Ibadur Rahman* or true Servants of the Most Gracious, make the *dua*:

Our Lord, grant us in our spouses and children comfort to our eyes. And make us exemplary to the God-fearing. [at-Furqan 25: 74.]

Having chosen the most suitable spouse, remember that your responsibility to yourself and to your family has not ended. Rather, your obligations in this regard have just started. You must follow the Prophet and be the best *uswa* or example to your family. Sayyida Aisha, the Prophet's wife, narrated that he said: `The best of you is he who is best to his family, and I am the best among you towards my family'. (*Tirmidhi*.)

Within the family, both husband and wife have different but equal roles to play. Both parties must complement each other in the fulfillment of their responsibilities: *They are garments for you while you are garments for them* [al-Baqara 2:187].

To further deepen the love and to improve communication between members of your family - spouse, children, parents - you should aim to establish the following three activities in your home.

- Firstly, perform some of your daily *Salat* collectively with your family. The Prophet said that, `when you have finished your [*Fard*] Prayer in the masjid, you should offer the rest of your Prayer at home for Allah will bless your home because of your Prayer.' (*Muslim*.)

- Secondly, establish an *usra* or family circle to study the Quran with your family. The Quran alludes to reading of the Quran in families and in homes in the following verse: *And remember that which is recited in your houses of the Revelations of* God *and the Wisdom*. [al-Ahzab 33: 34] You should aim to hold these sessions at least twice weekly, if not more regularly. Remember that the first recipients of the Message of the Quran were the members of the Prophet's household. They were the ones he paid most attention to in the early phase of his mission in Makka. So, you also must ensure that you spend adequate `quality' time in educating and training your family.

- Thirdly, develop the habit of having meals with your family. This will also provide a golden opportunity to interact with everyone, discuss family matters and reflect upon issues of the day.

Finally, to ensure that your home is a place of comfort and relaxation, you need to manage the stress in your life by adopting a balanced approach to living. Some degree of stress is inevitable and good. It keeps you aware and responsive. However, too much stress can damage your health, your relationships, and your ability to work for the sake of Allah. If you are taking your daily work stress to your home, then you may be disrupting one of the most important sources of your well being. You must continually evaluate yourself by sitting with your family and discussing your performance.

Discuss the responses to the following points with your family:

- The time I spend at work or in studying does not prevent me from having good communication with my family
- My family is aware of what I want to achieve in my job, my studies and my life.
- Most of my time at home is not spent in working or studying at the expense of interacting with my family.
- I adequately participate in family matters so that in future I will not be guilty of neglecting my family.
- My time is balanced among my family, masjid, personal obligations and among non-Muslims.
- My morality is the same at home as it is at school, work, the masjid and among non-Muslims.
- My family means more to me than worldly possessions and accomplishments.
- I keep an open mind when I consider how my decisions will affect my family.
- I am involved with all my family members and I try to share in their areas of interest.
- It is easy for me to relax when I leave my work or my studies. I appreciate the beauty that Allah has placed around me. [Islamic Horizons, Indianapolis, February 1985, P. 12]

OBLIGATIONS TO YOUR CHILDREN

As a parent, you must treat your children with love and kindness. The Prophet Muhammad said, `He does not belong to us, Muslims, who is not kind to our young and does not respect our old'. (*Tirmidhi*.) Indeed, if people were to observe this single *hadith* in their inter personal relations, many of the evils and discords that plague society would be removed.

Each child has the right to a good name, good character, good training, a quality education, and to be married to a suitable and compatible spouse. The Prophet further emphasised, `No father can give a better gift to his children than providing them with a good education'. (*Bayhaqi*.)

Within the family, both mother and father have important roles to play in the growth and development of their children. But, mothers have an even more important role because they are the real teachers. The love and attention they can provide, the father cannot match. The father, of course, has to contribute as much as he can in spending quality time with his children and being the best role model for them. But, the real training will come primarily from the mother's affection, compassion, example and teaching.

We must also treat all of our children with the full care and attention that they deserve, be they male or female. However, in contemporary times, and a similar situation existed in the time of the Prophet, parents seem to give preferential treatment to their sons. This is why the Prophet has told us that we have a special obligation to our female off spring. Ibn Abbas, may Allah be pleased with him, narrated that he said:

Anyone who looks after and brings up three daughters, or sisters, educates them well, treats them with compassion, until Allah makes them self-sufficient, Allah guarantees him Paradise.' A man asked. `Suppose there are only two?' He said, Yes, two as well.' People said, And if there be only one?' He said, `Yes, even if there is only one. (*Sharh al-Sunna*.)

This is how he emphasised the rights and obligations towards our children with special regard towards our daughters. This is something we must consider carefully.

OBLIGATIONS TO YOUR PARENTS

After your obligations to Allah, your parents have the greatest right over you. You should treat them with love, kindness and respect. *Your Lord has decreed that you shall serve none but Him, and do good to your parents. Should one or both of them reach old age with you, never say 'Ugh' to them, nor scold either of them; but speak to them kindly and respectfully.* [al-Isra 17: 23]

After every Prayer you should make *dua* for their well being. The Quran says, *spread over them the wings of humility and mercy and say, My Lord, have merry upon them, as they raised me up when I was little.* [al-Isra 17:24]

Even if your parents are non-Muslims and they insist on you participating in that which is unlawful, you still have an obligation to treat them with goodness and kindness. Remember that their cultural background may not make them easily receptive to your new faith. So, the best way you can present Islam to them is to become a loving, obedient and caring child. Your *uswa* or example to

your parents should also reflect the message of the Quran and the conduct of the Prophet Muhammad. The Quran explains the attitude we must adopt as follows:

And We enjoined upon man goodness towards hiss parents: his mother bore him by bearing strain upon strain, and his weaning takes two years. Hence, be thankful to Me and to your parents. With Me is the end of all journeys. Yet, should they endeavour to force you to make gods beside Allah, of whom you have no knowledge then do not obey them. But, even then keep them company in this world's life with customary good behaviour, but follow the faith of those who turn towards Me.
[Luqman 31: 14-15.]

Hadith literature is also filled with many accounts and guidelines concerning the manner in which we should treat our parents even if they are non-Muslims. In one account, Asma, may Allah be pleased with her, recorded the advice of the Prophet when she turned to him, being unsure about the manner in which she should treat her mother who was still a non-Muslim:

The mother of Asma, the daughter of Abu Balr, was still a polytheist when she came to visit Asma during the time of the Muslims' peace treaty with the Quraysh. Asma asked the Prophet, `O Messenger of Allah, my mother has come to see me. Should I receive her and treat her with all the affection that is her due?' He said, `Yes, treat her with full affection.' (*Bukhari. Muslim*.)

OBLIGATIONS TO YOUR FELLOW MUSLIMS

Ukhuwwa, brotherhood in Islam, is primarily an ideological bond that binds Muslims to each other. [al-Hujurat 49: 10.] The Prophet said: `The strongest link of faith is to love someone in order to gain the pleasure of Allah and to hate someone for the sake of Allah'. (*Ahmad*). This relationship with your brother or sister should be based on the following:

- ***Sincere Advice*:** You should give *nasiha* or sincere advice and counsel and you should also wish your brother well. A *hadith* states that `[The essence of] *Din* or religion is *nasiha*.' (*Muslim*.) True *iman* cannot be attained `until you love for your brother what you love for yourself.' (*Bukhari, Muslim*.) The Prophet also said: `The Believer is a mirror to a Believer, and the Believer is a brother to a Believer. He removes his injuries from him and protects him in his absence.' (*Tirmidhi*.)

- ***Self-sacrifice*:** You should give preference to your brother's welfare over your personal needs. The Quran records the attitude of true Believers: *But* [they] *give preference over themselves, even though poverty was their* [own lot]. [al-Hashr 59: 9.]

- ***Justice*:** The Quran declares: *Allah commands adl or justice and ihsan or doing that which is best.* [an-Nahl 16: 90.] You must fulfill all your obligations - moral, economic. social, and political - to all Muslims with firm and resolute justice.

- ***Doing that which is best*:** If *adl* is considered the foundation of your relationship, then, *ihsan* is its perfection. *Ihsan* demands that you do even more good to your brother. Additionally, if your brother does some wrong you must respond to the brother and his actions in a positive manner. The Quran advises: *The good deed and the evil deed cannot be equal. Repel* [the evil] *with that, which is better. Then he, between whom and you there was enmity, [will become] as though he was a close friend.* [al-Fussilat 41: 34]

- ***Mercy:*** *In the Quran, Allah has used the term rahma or mercy to depict the relationship between Muslims: Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah; and those who are with him are strong against unbelievers, [but] full of compassion [ruhama] among themselves. [al-Fath 48: 29]. The Prophet also taught us: `He who shows mercy, Allah will shower His mercy upon him. Be merciful to the people of this world so that the One above will show mercy on you.' (Abu Dawud.) He also said: `The Believers in their mutual love, compassion and sympathy are like one body: when one of its parts suffers from some illness, the rest of the body shares its suffering with sleeplessness and fever'. (Bukhari, Muslim.)*
: *In the Quran, Allah has used the term rahma or mercy to depict the relationship between Muslims: Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah; and those who are with him are strong against unbelievers, [but] full of compassion [ruhama] among themselves. [al-Fath 48: 29]. The Prophet also taught us: `He who shows mercy, Allah will shower His mercy upon him. Be merciful to the people of this world so that the One above will show mercy on you.' (Abu Dawud.) He also said: `The Believers in their mutual love, compassion and sympathy are like one body: when one of its parts suffers from some illness, the rest of the body shares its suffering with sleeplessness and fever'. (Bukhari, Muslim.)*

- ***Forgiveness:*** *Your heart should be filled with forgiveness for `anger destroys iman like poisonous medicine turns honey into waste' (Bayhaqi) The Quran also states: So, pass over [their faults] and ask for [Allah's] forgiveness for them. [Ali Imran 3: 159.]*
: *Your heart should be filled with forgiveness for `anger destroys iman like poisonous medicine turns honey into waste' (Bayhaqi) The Quran also states: So, pass over [their faults] and ask for [Allah's] forgiveness for them. [Ali Imran 3: 159.]*

- ***Patience and perseverance:*** *You must demonstrate sabr or patience and perseverance with your brother. Strive to forgive your brother wholeheartedly despite having the ability and the means to take revenge. The Quran states: But indeed if any show patience and forgive, that would be an affair of great resolution. [ash-Shura 42: 43.]*
: *You must demonstrate sabr or patience and perseverance with your brother. Strive to forgive your brother wholeheartedly despite having the ability and the means to take revenge. The Quran states: But indeed if any show patience and forgive, that would be an affair of great resolution. [ash-Shura 42: 43.]*

-***Reliance and appreciation:*** *Your brother must be able to count on you in times of need. You should share in the pain of his adversity and the pleasure of his prosperity.*: *Your brother must be able to count on you in times of need. You should share in the pain of his adversity and the pleasure of his prosperity.*

There are also certain things that you should consider in order to preserve the relationship with your brother and to prevent its disintegration. These include:

-Respect for his rights. [al-Baqara 2:229]

-Respect for the value of his life. [an-Nisa 4: 93]

-Being careful with your language ensuring that you do not use abusive language or words that will offend him. [al-Hujurat 49: 11]

-Ensuring that you never backbite or slander him. [al-Hujurat 49:12.]

-Ensuring that you never embarrass him, belittle him, cast suspicion on him, ridicule him or go in search simply to expose his faults. [al-Hujurat 49:11.]

-Ensuring that you do not hurt or harm him in any way; and finally never become jealous of him. [al-Falaq 113: 5.]

You can also make the relationship with your brother stronger by:

-Maintaining his honour and prestige. Participating in his pain and sorrow.

-Offering criticism and sincere advice to him; meeting him regularly.

-Visiting him when he is ill and making *dua* for his speedy recovery.

-Meeting him with love and a cheerful disposition; greeting him with words of peace.

-Embracing and shaking his hand on meeting him.

-Calling him by the best of names.

-Inquiring about his personal matters and expressing your concern and offering your assistance.

-Offering him gifts to express your love and closeness.

-Expressing your gratitude to him regularly.

-Sharing a meal with him whenever possible.

-Making *dua* for him regularly.

-Responding to him with love and affection.

-Always striving to settle your disputes with him in an amicable manner; being willing to forgive him.

Finally, always keep before you the verse of the Quran:

The Believers, men and women, are protectors of one another: they enjoin what is just and forbid

what is evil: they observe regular Prayers, practice regular charity and obey Allah and His Messenger. On them will Allah pour His Mercy: for Allah is Exalted in power, Wise. [at-Tawba 9: 71.]

OBLIGATIONS OF EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES

As an employer, you have an obligation to care for your staff; provide the most suitable working environment; and ensure that they are fully compensated punctually, for all their services rendered: 'Give the labourer his wages before his sweat dries'. (*Ibn Majah*.) The Prophet also said that one of the persons he shall be against on the Day of judgment is the man who does not pay the right wages to his employees after their labours.

As an employee, you must perform your job with diligence and proficiency. `Verily, Allah loves that when anyone of you does a job he should perfect it' (*al-Bayhaqi*.) The Quran also declares: *Work because Allah, the Prophet and the Believers will witness your work* [at-Tawba 9: 105.] Know that the best food is that which comes from your own efforts: `No one eats better food than what he earns by the labour of his own hands'. (*Bukhari*.)

OBLIGATIONS TO YOUR NEIGHBOURS

Neighbours have rights, be they Muslims or non-Muslims. The Prophet of Allah said: `He is not a true Believer who eats his fill while his neighbour is hungry'. (*Bayhaqi*.)

Thus, the quality of your *Din* and fate in the *Akhira* will also be determined by how well you fulfill your obligations towards your neighbours. In a *hadith* narrated by Abu Hurayrah, may Allah be pleased with him, a man said:

`O Messenger of Allah, such and such woman has a reputation for engaging very much in Prayers, Fasting and Almsgiving, but she hurts her neighbours with her tongue quite often.' He said, `She will go to Hell.' Then he said, `O Messenger of Allah, such and such woman engages in only a little Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving and gives just a few pieces of cheese in charity, but she does not hurt her neighbours with her tongue'. He said, `she will go to Paradise.' (*Ahmad, Bayhaqi*.)

The Quran defines the neighbour in a very wide sense. [an-Nisa 4: 36-37.] One class of neighbours is our relatives. Another class are those who are not our relatives and the third class of neighbours are those who sit with us, even for a few minutes. This third class of neighbours is a very wide group and includes those who sit by your side. If you are travelling in a taxi, bus, train or aeroplane the person who is sitting by your side is your neighbour. If you are in the office, your co-worker is your neighbour. If you are at school, your classmate is your neighbour. The Prophet gave a comprehensive account of our duties towards our neighbours when requested to do so by one of his Companions:

If he asks for a loan, you should give him a loan; if he wants your help, you should help him; if he be sick, you should go to see him; if he be needy you should try to fulfill his need; if he gets good news, you should congratulate him; if ,any calamity befalls him, it is your duty to console him; if he dies, you should attend his funeral; you should not raise your walls to such a height that they obstruct the ventilation of your neighbour's house, even if he is willing; do not tantalise your neighbour with the smell of your delicious food unless you send a portion of it to him; if you bring fruit into your house then send some to your neighbour; otherwise, keep it hidden from your neighbour, and you should also be careful that your children do not take some out, else the children

of your neighbour may feel disappointed. (*Tabarani*.)

Among the rights of your neighbour is that his life, property and honour must be protected. Violation of any of them is *haram* or unlawful. His life is inviolable. To kill someone - be he Muslim or non-Mushin - is such a great crime that if someone commits first degree murder Allah says that person will live in *Jahannam* forever and ever. Of course, if the death was accidental, one can pay compensation to the victim's family.

Remember that the life of a non-Muslim is as important as that of a Muslim. The Prophet Muhammad said that `One who kills a non-Muslim whose protection is pledged will never smell the fragrance of *Janna*, even though it reaches as far as 40 years distance'. (*Bukhari*, *Muslim*.)

So the life of the non-Muslim is also inviolable, as is his property and his honour. All must be respected and safeguarded. This is especially important for us to consider because we live in a multi-cultural and multi-religious society and, unfortunately, there are many misconceptions prevailing among Muslims about the extent of their obligations towards non-Muslims. The Prophet himself used to pay special attention to the needs of non-Muslims even when there was poverty, hardship and difficulties in the Muslim community.

THE RIGHTS OF ANIMALS

Animals have rights, for all of Allah's creatures comprise His `family'. Sahl ibn Amr narrated that once the Messenger of Allah, passed by a camel who was so emaciated that his belly seemed to have disappeared. He said, `Fear Allah regarding the animals who cannot speak. Ride on them while they are healthy, and eat of them when they are healthy'. (*Abu Dawud*.)

A famous hadith says that `a woman was punished and thrown into Hell-fire on account of her cat. She kept it tied up till it died of hunger: she neither gave it something to eat nor drink, nor let it go so that it could eat things on earth'. (*Bukhari, Muslim*.) The Prophet also said:

'Forgiveness was granted to a prostitute! She came upon a dog at the mouth of a well, which was panting and was about to die of thirst. She took off her leather sock, tied it with her headscarf and drew some water from the well for the dog. It was for this act of kindness that she was forgiven her sins.' When asked, 'Are we rewarded even for good we do to animals?' he replied, 'Reward is given for good done to any living creature.' (*Bukhari, Muslim*.)

If Allah commands us not to treat animals in this way, you can well imagine the extent of our obligations exhibited by someone, the dearer that person is to Allah.

SUMMARY

All creatures are Allah's family; and Allah loves most those who treat His family well and kindly. Our responsibility to others is especially important for us to consider for there is no Divine pardon in cases where personal rights have been violated.

Your primary obligation after satisfying your personal needs is towards your family. Indeed, after Allah, your parents have the greatest right over you. Fulfill your obligations towards your spouse and treat your children with love and kindness.

When it comes to the obligations to your fellow Muslims, know that the strongest link of faith is to love someone in order to gain the pleasure of Allah.

As an employer, know that you have an important responsibility towards your employees. Similarly, as an employee, you must perform your work with proficiency.

Your fate in the *Akhira* will also be determined by how well you fulfill your obligations to your neighbours be they Muslims or non-Muslims. The Prophet used to pay particular attention to the needs of non-Muslims even when there were difficulties in the Muslim community.

Animals have rights for all of Allah's creatures comprise His `family': `Fear Allah regarding the animals who cannot speak. Ride on them while they are healthy, and eat of them when they are healthy.'

May Allah enable us all to fulfill our obligations to the members of His family.

CHAPTER SEVEN: Meeting Allah

THE most important questions in life are those that deal with the meaning and purpose of man's existence. The Quran explains that the human being has been placed on this earth to utilise his enormous potential to conduct himself in a manner which will fulfill his purpose in life.

It is He who has created death and life that He may test which of you is best in deed. [al-Mulk 67: 2.]

The Quran further explains that man's role on earth is to live as his Creator desires him to live: in surrender and worship to Him alone. This is not because Allah in any way needs his worship, but because man needs to worship only his Creator and none else so that his own nature is not perverted and corrupted, and so that he does not live in opposition to his intrinsic character. Only by so living will his earthly life be set on the right path and prosper, bringing him peace and happiness.

I have not created jinn and men except to serve Me. I desire of them no provision; neither do I desire that they should feed Me. Surely God is the All-provider; the Possessor of Strength, the Eternal. [adh-Dhuriyat 51: 56-58.]

Man, with no 'mentionable' history before birth, has been given *the faculties of hearing and seeing,* [ad-Dahr 76: 2] *two eyes and a tongue, and a pair of lips,* [al-Balad 90: 8-9] as well as the capacity

to reason and discern between right and wrong in using his freedom of will.

Given freedom of will, judgment is inevitable. The human being must give an account of his conduct and must face the consequences of how he lives his life. Obviously, to be judged fairly, this judgment must be made only after his earthly life has come to an end, and only by the One who gave this life, who knows everything, and who is All-powerful and All-just. Only then can he be judged fairly, and duly rewarded and punished, for everything-from his innermost thoughts to the consequences of his conduct that extend far and wide, and beyond his life for generations to come.

What, did you think that We created you in mere idle play, and that you would not be returned to Us? But, high exalted is God, the King; the True! There is no god but He, the Lord of the Noble Throne. [al-Muminun 23: 115-116]

A person's ultimate destiny, therefore, lies in the Life to Come, in the *Akhira* Everyone will be judged there by due process of justice, fairly and equitably, mercifully and kindly. No one will be wronged or dealt with unjustly even by an atom's weight.

Surely God shall not wrong so much as an atom's weight. [an-Nisa 4: 40.]

This as only what you had sent forth, you are being recompensed only for what you had done before. [al-Kahf 18: 49]

Thus, everything in our lives is being recorded. Even the smallest of incidents will be replayed before our eyes on the Day of Judgment. That Judgment will be final and one from which there will be no escape. Paradise will be the reward for excellence in doing good, while Hell-fire will be the penalty for those who were ungrateful and indulged in evil:

The parable of the Paradise promised to those who are conscious of God [is that of a Garden] *through which running waters flow:* [but, unlike an earthly garden,] *its fruits will be everlasting, and* [so will be] *its shade. Such will be the destiny of those who remain conscious of God -just as the destiny of those who deny the truth will be the fire*. [ar-Rad 13: 35]

The delights and pleasures of the Hereafter, as well as, the penalty for those who condemn themselves to darkness and the wrath of Allah are described in such great detail in the Quran that almost one quarter of it is related to the *Akhira.* This is what the Prophet came to convey and this is what instills meaning and purpose to our lives.

THE OBJECTIVE OF LIFE

When the lifestyle of one who is working solely for the material gains of this world is compared with that of a person who is striving for the everlasting rewards of the Hereafter, there is seemingly very little difference. In both cases, each person is seen to be striving to maintain a quality life. The Quran, however, states that the two parties are far from equal: *Is then the one who believes equal to the man who is a transgressor and wicked? Not equal are they*. [as-Sajda 32: 18.]

It is clear that the non-believer, limited to himself and feeding upon his own desires cannot, compare with the true Believer. The non-believer may find that all his worldly desires are fulfilled, but his accomplishments will only bring temporary satisfaction;

To him who desires only this fleeting life, We grant him only here and only as much as We please, only to whomever We will: but in the end We consign him to Hell. [al-Isra 17: 18.]

The true Believer on the other hand, may achieve worldly gains but he realises that true contentment will only come when the ultimate reward of Paradise and the pleasure of his Lord is achieved.

Verily, that which is with Allah is best for you, if you, but knew all that which is with you is bound to end, whereas all that which is with Allah is everlasting. [an-Nahl 16:95-96.]

This understanding of life and its true objective is the secret of the believer's strength and support. This makes him the most powerful and resourceful person to walk upon the earth, The Quran continues in Sura al-Isra:

But, as for those who desire the life to come, and strive for it as it ought to be striven for, and are true Believers- they are the ones whose strivings find acceptance and reward. [al-Isra 17: 19.]

Start, then, to prepare for the *Akhira* today! Why waste your time and energy on what will perish when you can use the same to earn the delights and pleasures of the life to come? Everything you have must be put forward as an investment for that life, but you must keep in mind that the investment is not the objective. All that Allah has bestowed on you -body, mind, faculties and property -are valuables for investment, but the real objective is to earn the pleasure of Allah and the rewards of *Janna*.

Remember that your personal destiny and, therefore, the end of all your life's pursuits, lie in the *Akhira,* but the road to that destiny lies in *Dunya*, in this world. Indeed the achievements made during the time of the Prophet were the results of full participation in this world - neither withdrawing nor retiring from it - for the sake of the Life to Come. The Prophet and his Companions planned for this world as though they were going to stay here forever but equally they sought the rewards of the Hereafter as though death was close at hand. It is this delicate balance that you must strive to achieve in your approach to life. The Prophet Muhammad said:

This *Din* or way of life is easy. But if anyone overdoes it, it gets the better of him. So keep to the right course, approximate to perfection, rejoice, and ask for help in the mornings, the evenings, and some of the later part of the night. (*Bukhari*.)

THE REALITY OF THE HEREAFTER

For those who sat and listened to the Prophet, the Hereafter became almost a living reality to the extent that they could almost visualise it with their own eyes. On some occasions, during the Prophet's descriptions of the *Akhira*, they observed him going forward as if to grasp something while on other occasions he would withdraw as if to save himself. When questioned about those unusual movements the Prophet explained that as he spoke, he saw the fruits of *janna* in front of him. He reached out wanting to seize some so that he could show them. He said that, had he done so, it would have provided enough food for the entire world in all times to come. Similarly, when he withdrew, he saw the Hell-fire in front of him and wanted to save himself from it. It was this and other similar experiences witnessed by the *Sahaba* which were responsible for reforming their lives so completely that all their morals, manners, activities, goals in life - indeed, their entire purpose of existence - was determined by their awareness of their meeting with Allah. It is this reality and conviction in our ultimate fate - repeatedly emphasised in the Quran and in the life example of the Prophet - that we must continuously refer to for inspiration in conducting life's activities.

THE CERTAINTY OF DEATH

Allah has created everything with a fixed life span. The Quran states: *It is not given to any soul to die save by Gods permission, and at an appointed time.* [Ali Imran 3: 145.] Indeed there is no certainty in life except death. *Every soul will taste death*. [Ali Imran 3:185.] Not only is death itself inescapable, but the place and the very day and hour of death have been forever fixed: *No person knows what he will earn tomorrow and no person knows in what land he will die*. [Luqman 31: 34.] *When the time arrives they cannot tarry a single moment nor can they go ahead*. [an-Nahl 16: 61.]

In death, we are compelled to return to God. In life, however, we can choose to draw closer to God voluntarily by living our lives according to His will. In this way, we have the opportunity to meet Allah and gain His pleasure even before we leave this world.

Those who fail to use the bounties of Allah to earn His pleasure during this life, will forever regret their mistakes for the cessation of life brings the cessation of opportunities for redemption and salvation, as the Quran warns:

When death comes to one of them, he says, My Lord, let me return, let me return to life, so that I may act righteously in whatever I have left behind"Nay, it is but a meaningless word he utters; for behind them now is the barrier of death until the day they shall be raised up. Then, when the Trumpet will be blown, no lies of kinship will remain between them that day, neither would anyone be able to take care of another. Then, they whose weight of good deeds is heavy in the balance will attain salvation. But, they whose weight is light in the balance, will have squandered their own lives. In Hell will they abide forever. [al-Muminun 23: 99-103.]

MAN'S FORGETFULNESS

Though death is certain, we tend to forget from time to time our meeting with our Lord. This forgetfulness, although part of human nature can make us stray from our true mission in life: *If anyone withdraws himself from Allah's remembrance, Most Gracious, We appoint for him an evil one to be his intimate companion*. [az-Zukhruf 43: 36] Forgetfulness, however, can be overcome by remembering Allah in all of life's activities, as the Quran again declares: *Those who fear Allah, when a thought of evil from Shaytan assaults them, bring Allah to remembrance -whereupon, lo! They see aright*. [al-Araf 7: 201.] Additionally, we are urged in the Quran to make the following supplication:

Our Lord take us not to task if we forget or make mistakes. Our Lord lay not upon us a burden like that which you laid on those before us.

Our Lord, make us not bear burdens which we have no strength to bear. Pardon us, and forgive us, and have mercy on us. You are our Lord Supreme: Help us against people who deny the truth. [al-Baqara 2: 286.]

Know that to fear death from which there is no escape is *foolish*. Having no fear of what is going to happen after death, though it is within our power to change it in our favour, is *reckless*. Allah reminds us in the Quran, *Do not throw yourself into destruction with your own hands*. [al-Baqara 2: 195.] For, no effort to please Allah will be left unrewarded, while every effort made to seek the pleasures of this world will come to naught. Moreover, the Prophet reminded us that nothing will go

with us to our graves except our

deeds and that constant reminder of death will assist in keeping our indulgence in *Dunya* in perspective: `Remember often the terminator of pleasures [i.e. death]'. (*Tirmidhi*.) He also advised that we should take time to attend *janaza* or funeral prayers, as well as visit the graves of those who have made the transition into the Next-life, for these too will serve as reminders of our eventual fate: `He who expects to meet God should visit the graves for they remind us of the Hereafter'. (*Muslim*.)

The Prophet also wanted us that if we seek only the fulfillment of our selfish worldly desires, our lives may well become filled with frustration:

Whoever allows the world to become his biggest concern has nothing to do with Allah, and Allah will instill four qualities into his heart: anxiety which will never leave him, business which he will never be free from; poverty which he will never rid himself of, and hope which he will never fulfill. (*Tabarani*.)

Additionally, one of the worst punishments the Quran describes is reserved for those who remain forgetful of Allah. On the Day of Judgment Allah will not speak to them. He will not even look in their direction. In this world they will claim to belong to Allah but they are heedless of His commands. On the Day that matters most, there will be a wall between them and Allah. His mercy and His compassion will be overflowing, but not for them.

Behold those who barter away their bond with Allah and their pledges for a trifling gain - they shall not partake in the blessings of the life to come; and Allah will neither speak unto them nor will He cleanse them of their sins; and grievous suffering awaits them. [Ali Imran 3: 77.]

SEEKING ALLAH'S MERCY

The abundance of Allah's *rahma* or mercy will not come without pure actions. Pure actions, however, when performed, will make you deserving of Allah's mercy. This, in turn, will enable you to earn the delights of *janna* and His pleasure. The Quran proclaims: *Call on Him with fear and longing. Surely, Allah's mercy is ever near to the doers of good*. [al-Araf 7:56.] The Messenger of God also said:

`No one will be saved [from the Hell fire and admitted into Paradise] by his deeds alone.' When asked, `Not even you, O Messenger of God!', he said, 'Yes, not even me, unless Allah covers me with His mercy. So, do good deeds properly, sincerely and moderately in the morning, in the afternoon and during part of the night. Always remember moderation and always abide by moderation. Thus, you will reach your destination.' (*Bukhari, Muslim*.)

Be reassured that Allah is not a vengeful God, ready to punish, but rather, one who is full of mercy and compassion. He, Himself has declared: *My mercy encompasses all things*. [al-Araf 7: 156.] Likewise, consider, the manner in which our actions are recorded in His scale of justice, as explained by the Prophet:

Allah records the good deeds and the bad deeds thus: If anyone intends to do a good deed but does not actually do it, Allah writes it down with Him as a full good deed. If he intends it, and does it too, Allah writes it down with Him as ten to seven hundred times that good deed, or many times over. If anyone intends to do a bad deed but does not actually do it, Allah writes it down with Him as a full good deed. When he intends a bad deed and does it as well, only then Allah writes it down as one bad deed. (*Bukhari, Muslim*.)

Thus, as long as our actions are worthy and deserving of Allah's mercy, His mercy will not be denied to us. The Prophet has again explained:

There are one hundred parts of mercy. Allah has given only one part which is distributed among the jinn, humankind, animals and insects. It is because of this that they are kind to one another, show mercy to one another; it is because of it that a wild animal is kind to its young. But, Allah has kept ninety-nine parts of mercy with Him, which He will show to His servants on the Day of Resurrection. (*Bukhari, Muslim*.)

SEEKING ALLAH'S FORGIVENESS

The decision to live our lives for the sake of Allah is no guarantee that we will not forget Allah and commit mistakes for `all children of Adam are sinners, but best among sharers are those who constantly repent'. (*Tirmidhi*.) Imam Bukhari recorded that even the Prophet, though he was sinless, `sought Allah's forgiveness 70 times a day'. We should therefore, constantly seek the forgiveness of Allah for every single sin, small or great. Allah says:

Ask forgiveness from your Lord, then turn towards Him in repentance; He will loosen the sky over you in abundance, and He will add strength unto your strength. [Hud 11: 52.]

Seeking continuous forgiveness of Allah will assist in ensuring that our hearts and souls remain pure

and wholesome. The Prophet said in this regard:

When a Believer sins, a black spot appears on his heart. But if he repents and seeks Allah's forgiveness, his heart becomes cleansed and polished. However if he continues to commit more and more sins [without seeking forgiveness, the spot continues to spread and ultimately covers all of his heart. This is the rust which Allah mentions [in the Quran]: *What deeds they earn rust upon their hearts*. [al-Mutaffifin 83: 14.] (*Ahmad, Tirmidhi*.)

Whatever the magnitude of our misdeeds, Allah is always ready to respond with an even greater amount of pardon. Therefore, never despair of the mercy of Allah, in seeking His forgiveness, even for those sins committed repeatedly: *O My servants who have transgressed against themselves, despair not of Allah's mercy; for Allah forgives all sins, surely He is the all-forgiving, the Mercy-giving.* [az-Zumar 39: 53.] Thus, as long as there is hope there remains opportunity for redemption and salvation. Be aware, though, that the best form of repentance involves a firm resolve to reform and do better. The Messenger of Allah said:

Remain conscious of Allah and Fear Him wherever you are, and follow a bad deed with a good deed which will wipe it out, and behave well towards people. (*Tirmidhi*.)

SELF-EVALUATION

The Prophet emphasised the necessary of *Ihtisab* or self evaluation at every opportunity: `Everyone starts his day and is a vendor of his soul, either freeing it or bringing about its ruin'. (*Muslim*.) Umar ibn al Khattab, may Allah be pleased with him, also said in this respect:

Judge yourself before you are judged, evaluate yourself before you are evaluated and be ready for the greatest investigation.

At every Prayer time, especially in the early hours of the morning, when you are alone and can feel your own heart beating -seek forgiveness from Allah. The time of *Salat al-Fajr*, before the start of each day, is an ideal occasion to take account of yourself and plan for the day ahead.

Imam Tirmidhi related that the Prophet said, on the Day of judgment no child of Adam will move from the presence of God, unless he has answered the following five questions:

-In what pursuits and work did he spend his time?

-For what ends did he use his mental and physical energies?

-By what means did he earn his wealth?

-How did he spend his wealth?

-How far did he act according to what he knew was right?

These five points can serve as a useful self-analysis programme. They can assist in checking our moral motivations, God-consciousness and determination to work for the cause of Allah. This self-analysis programme, when implemented on a regular basis, will serve as an important measure of your readiness to meet with Allah.

CONQUERING FEAR OF DEATH

The Day of judgment, though it is to be feared, must also inspire in us a desire and eagerness to meet Allah. Sayyida Aisha reported that the Prophet said:

`Whoever loves to meet Allah, Allah loves to meet with him; and whoever dislikes the meeting with Allah, Allah also dislikes the meeting with him.'

I asked: `O Prophet of God, is it because of the dislike of death, for all of us dislike death?'

He said: `It is not so, but rather it is that when the Believer is given news of Allah's mercy. His approval and His Paradise, he likes to meet Allah and Allah likes to meet him; but when the unbeliever is given news of Allah's punishment and His displeasure, He dislikes to meet Allah and Allah dislikes to meet him.' (*Muslim*.)

Our eagerness and desire to meet Allah should therefore, be echoed in all our Prayers. The Prophet

Muhammad used to supplicate repeatedly:

O Allah, I ask you for a soothing life after death, and I ask you for the pleasure of looking upon Your Face and for the yearning to meet You, free from suffering distress or from trial that leads one astray. O Allah, adorn us with the ornament of faith and make us guides and rightly guided. (*an-Nasai*.)

This desire to meet Allah will calm our fear of death, which is only a natural instinct. Even the Prophet Musa, on whom be peace, out of fear ran away when he saw his staff turning into a serpent. [Ta Ha 20: 17-24.] Fear, though, can be conquered with *dhikr*, doing good and keeping ever before us, our meeting with the Lord and Master of the Day of Judgment.

Whoever hopes to meet his Lord He should do good deeds and associate none other in the service of his Lord [al-Kahf 18: 110.]

SUMMARY

Preparation to meet Allah must be the purpose and ultimate goal of our existence. It is the most critical decision and resolution we must make today. This will set the course and direction of our entire lives - to live according to the Quran, as shown by that most noble of exemplars, Muhammad, upon whom be peace.

The knowledge that Allah is pleased with us will be the climax of our mission in life. This will be attained when we find Him responding, God willing, to each of us in our hour of greatest need with the reassuring and welcoming words:

O soul at peace, return unto your Lord, well-pleased, well pleasing! Enter among My servants! Enter My Paradise! [al-Fajr 89: 27-30.]